

THE BUFFALO BILL

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION



STORIES

DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 228 William St., N. Y.

No. 158.

HARRY M. LANE.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S COLD CHASE

OR
RUNNING DOWN REDSKINS ON THE ICE



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

The scout and his followers sped forward like the wind. Closer and closer they came to the Indians. "Now we have them, boys!" cried Buffalo Bill. "Take the chief alive, and wipe out the rest of them!"



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HARRY M. LANE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE INDIAN GIANT.

It was a bright, "stinging" January day in the Territory of Idaho.

The winter so far had been one of unusual severity in the matter of low temperature. Of snowstorms there had not been many, however, even among the mountains.

The beautiful lake of Cœur d'Alene was almost entirely frozen over. The ice was mostly of considerable thickness, and of glassy smoothness.

From the wooded shore of an arm of the lake, a short distance from where the Spokane River starts on its journey to swell the volume of the Columbia, a singular figure glided out upon the frozen surface.

It was that of a man of extraordinary stature, clad in the garb of an Indian, with a headdress as elaborate as that of the most prominent of chieftains.

He was mounted on skates, in the use of which he seemed to be especially skilled.

With his wonderfully long legs every stroke carried him over a remarkably long distance, and at a speed that almost equaled that of a racehorse.

Of weapons, this mysterious individual carried, in sight, a long knife and a tomahawk of a size and weight which were suited to his own gigantic proportions.

If he had other means of defense they were hidden under the heavy tunic which he wore.

This gigantic Indian skated out until he was half-way across the narrow arm of the lake, which he seemed bent upon crossing. Then, with a suddenness that sent the powdered ice flying like snow from under his sharpened skates, he brought himself to a halt.

For a moment he gazed steadfastly toward a certain point of the wooded shore half a mile distant. He did not stir a muscle while bestowing this scrutiny.

At last, with a guttural exclamation, he started ahead again, but at a slower pace, and all the while not taking his eyes off the point which he had so keenly observed.

Had he actually seen anything more than the ordinary aspects of the wooded shore? Had the motion of the foliage at a certain point been anything more than, or different from, that caused by the brisk wind which was cutting across the lake?

It was toward a spot near the point in question that the Indian giant was going. He kept on, at a more moderate pace, until he was within two hundred yards of the shore.

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

Then he halted again, with another grunt, which may have been expressive of any of the various emotions peculiar to his race. And again he stared hard at the shore.

It could not have been that he saw the man who was at the moment actually standing concealed by the interlacing branches of an evergreen copse.

The foliage was dense, and the man's body was entirely hidden by it. The eyes of a hawk could not have detected his presence, at the distance at which the Indian giant was standing.

The individual was no other than Buffalo Bill, and he was not the man to be lax about any precaution that was required to insure concealment from the enemy, or from any from whom it might be safer to be concealed.

He knew that it was simply impossible that the Indian giant should have obtained a glimpse of him. Then what had drawn the eyes of the mysterious Indian so searchingly to that spot?

"The varmints aren't all alike," he muttered. "But sometimes I think some of them have a sixth sense—some power that a white man knows nothing about."

"That is the one they call the Indian giant, and nobody seems to know to a certainty whether he is on the side of the hostile reds that are devastating the country, or not."

"He has not appeared openly in any of the raids, so far as I have learned. And yet he always seems to be around where there is the most trouble, and he hasn't been known to lend a helping hand to the whites."

"Not knowing just how to place the big fellow, I don't feel like putting a bullet in his brain from ambush. But I've got to know what he is about, and on which side of the game he is putting up his cards. Ah! He has decided not to make a landing at this point—he's going farther up the lake. And again I wonder why he smells something risky right here?"

The Indian giant was moving easily out toward a point of land that projected as a narrow peninsula just beyond the little harbor.

"What suppose I start out boldly and meet him, and see if I can make him talk? He doesn't seem to carry any firearms, and I have been told that it was believed that he never carries any. So if he wanted a fight I could give it to him at an advantage. Luckily, knowing the sort of conditions I would be likely to find here at this season, I provided myself with a good pair of skates. In a race on the ice, length of legs counts, and that Indian giant could probably distance me. But he wouldn't do it too easy."

This suggestion struck the scout so favorably, and he was so eager to settle that part of the matter at once that he turned back to the spot where he had been waiting to get his skates.

He had but just partaken of a hasty and chilly repast, for he had not dared to build a fire, for fear that the smoke would betray his position to the Indians,

whom he had reason to believe swarmed along the wooded shores of the lake.

The distance to the nearest mountain settlement was not great, and Buffalo Bill well knew that that settlement was decided on by the redskins as their next point of attack.

By an almost herculean effort in the way of swift journeying, Cody had succeeded in getting word to them of the meditated attack by the redskins.

While Buffalo Bill had come to this point alone, he nevertheless expected to be joined by an old comrade of many a hard campaign. The meeting place was to be at or near the spot where he was now waiting, and he was not surprised, therefore, when he returned to the spot to find Wild Bill, the pistol prince, leaning carelessly against the trunk of a tree, smoking his pipe.

They had not met for several months, the appointment having been made by messenger. And yet they met as if they had parted ten minutes ago.

"Fetch skates with you, Bill?" were Cody's first words.

"Skates! Take me for a youngster?" demanded the gruff-spoken borderman.

"We've got a deal of skurrying around to do from one point to another, and it is shorter to go across the lake than around it. Better time can be made with skates than with a horse, and it is easier to get through the tangle on the shore."

"S'pose I didn't think of that?" retorted Wild Bill.

He unslung a small knapsack, or kit, and fished out a pair of skates which were rather ancient in pattern, but which shone like silver in evidence of good care.

"Now, Buffalo, what is doing? I'm ready," he said.

"You've heard of that big, mysterious redskin that they call the Indian giant?" queried Buffalo Bill, as he led the way toward the lake shore.

"From the two or three white men that I met on the way here I didn't hear of much else. I reckoned that the swarms of bloodthirsty redskins of the ordinary size, that seem to be everywhere, didn't count with the settlers hereabout."

"Well, I'll show him to you, and give you a chance to race for a closer view of him."

They were at the lake shore. Buffalo Bill pointed out across the level stretch where the Indian giant was skating, now cutting a wide circle with swift, easy strokes.

It almost looked as if he was doing it for amusement.

The two scouts, while close to the edge of the ice, were, as it seemed, still well concealed by the shrubbery, for both crouched close to the ground and peered through the densely interlacing twigs.

"He's a big one, that's sure," muttered Wild Bill.

"How tall do you reckon?"

"A little under seven feet, maybe."

"More inches under it than you imagine. Six feet six makes a big man, and add three inches and you

have a monster. Not half the show giants are as tall as they make 'em out to be."

"It may be that we'll have a chance to measure the devil. Shall we try a race after him, just to see what he'll do?"

"Yes. I was going to try it just as you got here."

"Has he guns?"

"None in sight. He was closer when I first glimpsed him. He seemed to scent danger in this direction, and swerved off immediately."

"Couldn't he have seen you?"

"No. Unless he can see us now. Ah!—see him now!"

As the border king spoke last the Indian giant changed his course so that he once more faced the shore where the two scouts were watching.

And they saw him come almost to a halt and stare hard at the very spot where they sat on the ground, putting on their skates.

"He seems to see us!" exclaimed Wild Bill, in amazement.

"It seems about as likely that he smells us!" said Buffalo Bill, impatiently.

For the persistence with which the Indian giant seemed to spot him, every move he might make, no matter how carefully he might keep himself concealed, made a tantalizing sort of puzzle that was irritating to him.

"We'll give him a good show at us, and let him see that we can skim the ice as well as he!" exclaimed Cody as he leaped to his feet, with his skates securely strapped on.

Buffalo Bill's skates had been made for him especially the year before, and after a design of his own, which anticipated, in certain details, the most modern "racers."

They were of the best of steel, and with long blades. Accident either to steel or strap was impossible.

"You'll leave me easy—the race will be betwixt you and the big redskin," said Wild Bill, who was also ready to go.

"Perhaps—I think my skates are speedier than yours. But you can cut him off so that he can't get to the nearest point of the shore, and so give me a longer stretch for trying him."

"All right. Here goes for it!"

The two scouts shot out upon the ice like bolts from a bow!

CHAPTER II.

THE RACE, AND WHAT BROKE IT UP.

At the instant that the scout pards skated out for the purpose of audaciously overtaking and cutting off the Indian giant, the latter was facing away from them, so that they obtained a good start before his singularly keen instincts warned him of what was happening.

Then he saw them, and to their surprise he came momentarily to a full stop.

Was he going to wait for them to come up with him? At first they thought that such was his intention. But they soon found out their mistake.

He cut a swift, skillful circle, then maneuvered for a brief space as a clever skater will do when he is cutting the initials of some girl friend on the ice.

Then, wheeling like lightning, he sped away across the broad surface of the lake, without attempting to make for either of the nearest points of the shore.

"He's going to try my speed," decided Buffalo Bill.

Wild Bill had separated from the latter, according to the original program, by which he was to prevent the giant from making a successful dash for cover nearer at hand.

Then, seeing that it promised to be a straight, clear race, he struck in on a direct line for the fugitive.

At first the latter did not seem to try very hard to distance his pursuers.

But as the separating space began unmistakably to close up, the giant was seen to gradually accelerate his pace, until he was gliding with the speed of the wind.

This was done without any evident straining or effort.

But, for that matter, Buffalo Bill was not doing his best. As yet he had never fairly tested his skates, which had been made for him a year before, but too late in the season to allow of a fair trial.

At first he had to get used to them, as they were so unlike those which he had been accustomed to use.

But it did not take him long to discover their possibilities. As soon as he fairly got "the hang of them" he found that there was almost no limit to the speed that might be gotten out of them.

Faster and faster sped the pursuer, and faster and faster glided the pursued. The Indian giant now cast frequent backward glances, and it was evident that he was keeping a close account of the speed of his pursuer.

Yet he did not appear to be anxious as to the outcome.

In truth, instead of making for the shore which was the nearest accessible one, taking into account the fact that Wild Bill cut him off from the narrow peninsula, the giant skater seemed bent upon choosing a long reach of a diagonal course across the lake. To reach the shore at the point for which he seemed to be aiming, would call for a ten-mile stretch—and that is a long one on skates, at racing speed.

When Buffalo Bill perceived the direction of the Indian giant's flight he was half inclined to drop the chase where it was.

"What is the use?" he asked himself.

"He is just showing what he can do, and trying me. If I succeed in overtaking him, it would be like catching an elephant, for I should hardly know what use to make of him."

"I wouldn't shoot him till I knew him to be dan-

gerous to the white settlers. He may not really side with either the hostile reds or the whites. In that case, too, I should have to let him live. Bullets are not just to kill men with. And to take that big fellow alive, and single-handed, won't be an easy stunt.

"Within a lasso throw I could probably land him. But he'll never let me get that near if he can help it. And I can see that, at best, I'll have to use up about the whole of the stretch across the lake before I can get near enough to him to do anything more than shooting, which I won't do, under the circumstances."

Thus did the phases of the situation impress themselves on the mind of the pursuer. And so did he discuss it with himself.

Yet he did not in reality falter for a moment in the pursuit. The mere zest of the chase, like that of a herd of buffalo, was enough to keep him in it.

He looked back to see what had become of Wild Bill.

The latter was already a long distance behind.

But then he did not seem to be trying to keep up.

He could see that none of the glory of winning could belong to him, and he did not care to strain his limbs just to show the inferiority of his skates and his ability to use them, as compared with Buffalo Bill and the Indian giant.

Presently it became evident that Buffalo Bill was beginning to gain.

The Indian giant evidently perceived the fact. Yet he did not at once put forth any especially strenuous effort.

It was a long chase if they were to keep on in the direction they were going.

There would be time to put in the best work on the last laps of the race. And probably the Indian was reserving his best speed for the last spurt.

But the border king was doing the same, although he was undoubtedly working rather harder than was the Indian, for the reason that the space that separated them was so wide that it would take a fair rate of gain for a considerable length of time to close it up, so as to make victory even remotely possible.

For Wild Bill there seemed to be nothing more to do except to remain as near as he could that he might be a spectator of the game.

But the fact that he could not, as it appeared, have much to do in it, did not slacken his interest in the least.

He was not the kind that felt a sense of injury because he could not take a chief part in the contest.

For that matter, he thoroughly enjoyed a good match of any kind. And as he saw the border king bending yet harder to the chase, and that he was really gaining at an increasing rate, somewhat of the excitement of the chase entered into his blood.

"It is going to be a hot one!" he muttered, under his breath.

By this time, certain that there would be nothing for

him to do in the way of keeping the fugitive from turning in for a nearer point of land, Wild Bill had struck into a direct line with that pursued by the racers.

He was falling behind, but he was still close enough to mark every point that was being made on either side.

"Not yet halfway across," he muttered again.

Then he observed an abrupt shift in the course of the Indian giant.

He was no longer going on a diagonal course. He had started in a direct line across to the nearer point of shore.

This would cut off several miles of the distance.

Now the race would soon be over, for it was a short course after the distance already covered was counted out.

Buffalo Bill did not fancy the shift.

It reduced his chances of winning out.

For the first time the scout strained every nerve for a new record.

He began to make it.

Wild Bill stared in amazement as he observed the increase in the speed made by his pard.

"Why, it must be that he wasn't trying before! He would beat a railroad train. And the big redskin sees what is doing, and is beginning to stretch out his long legs.

"Lord!—see them go! I wish I could have a record of the speed they're making. I had no idea that anything like it could be done on skates. Why, with a good company of scouts on skates we could drive a herd of redskins across the lake and round them up slick as anything."

The Indian giant seemed to realize that there must be some point of superiority in the skates used by his pursuer, since in no other way could a man of ordinary stature like Buffalo Bill outstrip another with such length of limb.

It was evident that the giant was already doing his best.

He was bending his long body forward and making reaches which carried him forward with the speed of an ice yacht.

But a long pendulum swings slower than a short one.

So Buffalo Bill, with shorter limbs, took more strokes to the minute than was possible to his opponent in the race. And this fact, with the superiority of his skates, on the whole a little more than made up for the greater length of limb of the giant.

The scout was unmistakably gaining, although not so fast as he had been doing a few moments before.

It was now a question as to whether he could come within the throw of a lasso before the Indian should reach the shelter of the trees on the shore.

The scout was within easy rifle range of the Indian giant. He decided that, if it proved to be impossible to overtake the fugitive, he might try what a threat with the rifle might do.

Yet he resolved to use it merely as a bluff, as he would not blindly shoot down the mysterious giant of the lake.

By this time the space separating the leader in the race from the shore was so narrow that it was evident there would not be much more time to choose the final course of action.

The race must be wound up at once. And the scout was not yet close enough to hazard a throw of the lasso.

It must be a bluff with the rifle.

But slightly slackening his pace, Buffalo Bill unslung the weapon from his shoulder.

Then he uttered a quick yell to attract the attention of the Indian giant.

The latter glanced back and saw the threat.

"Stop if you don't want me to shoot!" he called, in a tone that could not fail to be heard by the other.

A peculiar yell broke from the lips of the Indian giant.

At the same time he came to a halt and whirled about so as to face his pursuer.

As he did this a perfect chorus of Indian yells broke upon the air, and simultaneously more than a score of painted redskins burst out of the forest and dashed forth upon the lake!

CHAPTER III.

THE WILD WORK IS BEGUN.

There was a turn of the tables.

It was against the king of the border this time.

And, as he was forced to circle swiftly to one side to avoid racing straight into the midst of the foe, he saw the Indian giant perform a similar maneuver, as if he, too, was unwilling to plunge into the oncoming crowd.

In a moment more Buffalo Bill was skating up the lake in a direction that gave him an unbroken line of ice as far as his eyes could reach.

The distant mountain heights was all he could see beyond the stretch of frozen surface.

But it was not merely a matter of skating away from the yelling redskins, who could not skate at all, and who therefore stood no show in the race.

For the Indians, after the first dash, abandoned the chase, and although they did not come to a halt, they began firing rapidly and wildly after the retreating scout.

The latter heard the lead whistling over his head, indicating that they were overshooting the mark.

But at any moment a chance shot might make him trouble and Buffalo Bill could not stand for that.

So, again changing his course, so that he was half facing them, he up with his rifle and sent back a shot that went true.

In three successive and quickly fired shots he sent as

many of the pursuing reds to their "happy hunting grounds."

This brought them to a pause, in sheer consternation.

They fired a few more shots at the scout, but with no better effect than before—they were demoralized by their ill fortune.

The dead redskins were picked up and the whole party made a break for the cover of the woods on the shore.

Once shielded by the trees, they reasoned, they might try some more shots at the scout. But it was not their way to fight while the enemy had as good a show of hitting them as they did of dropping him.

In the open Indians are almost always confused and wild in their marksmanship. It is only when they are fighting in their own way, hidden behind rocks and trees, that they show up as a dangerous foe.

Under the cover of darkness, too, they will do fearful work. But by daylight, and in the open, almost never.

Under such conditions a small party of whites may defeat a body of Indians numbering a score against their one.

Now and then, on rare occasions, when fighting for their very lives, the Indians have done some desperate work in open battle. But the conditions and results are alien to their habits and training.

As soon as Buffalo Bill was sure that the redskins were in full flight he did not stop to continue firing upon them.

He, too, was in the open, and they would soon be sheltered by the trees on the shore. Then there would be the best chance in the world for them to get in a telling shot in return for what he had done to them.

It was a debt that he would rather should not be paid. It did not matter if it were to outlaw.

Meanwhile, Wild Bill, with his usual show of pluck, was plumping straight ahead, right in the teeth of the redskins, at least until they started on their retreat.

It did not take long for Buffalo Bill to join him, for they were skating towards each other.

When they came together they were about half a mile from the shore.

As for the Indian giant, he had made for a point of the shore about two hundred yards distant from the place where the bunch of redskins had appeared.

It did not look, therefore, as if he intended to join the redskins. Nor had there been anything to show that the giant and the other Indians were allies.

The big Indian was now invisible, hidden among the trees at the spot where he had landed.

"Well, there was a bit of hot shot, and pretty close to an ambush for ye, Buffalo!" was Wild Bill's greeting as the two scouts paused face to face, both breathing hard from their violent exertions.

"It looked like an ambush, only they didn't wait for me to get to the shore."

"The big Injun see that you was getting too close

to him, and he didn't dare to wait. So he gave the signal."

"So you think he meant to lead me into the midst of those devils?"

"Looks like it."

"And that the yell he let out was a signal to them?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't say you're mistaken."

"But you think I am?"

"Yes, I think you are."

"You don't think there was any connection between the giant Injun and the rest of the crowd that attacked you?"

"No."

"I'd like to know what in thunder makes you so durned friendly to that big Injun? I should think you'd figured out that he is a particular friend of yours."

"It may be that he meant to make me trouble on his own account, or that he would have tried to brain me with the tomahawk at his belt if he had had a chance."

"But you don't believe it?"

"No."

"Waal, Buffalo, there has been a lot of times that I've thought one way and you've figured just the opposite, and it has most always turned out that you were right and I wrong. But past experience along that line won't make me give up every time till I get the proof."

"Hold your opinion, Bill. This may be the time when it will turn out the other way. There's a mystery about the big redskin that I would like to understand, and I'm for holding over on this side of the lake until I find out whether he joins the hostile reds or not. Then, if I have another chance at him as good as the one I have just let go by, I will know enough to use my rifle on him."

"Yes, it does look as if it would be a good idea to make sure while you're about it. But what do you want of me? In real Injun work I rather act under orders."

"You had better keep with me for the present. Settlers and miners have been attacked, cabins and shacks burned, the people murdered, and, likely enough, some of them taken prisoners. I reckon there's a big camp of the Indians on this side of the lake, and that the party that came out at me are only a small part of them."

"Pretty sure that's the case."

"Then it will be worth while to get close to their camp at the first chance and see how they're made up. At the same time we'll find if the Indian giant is among them."

"Correct."

"But it won't do to run in where they'll spot us right in broad daylight. They'll see that we don't get a glimpse of them."

"If we could get out beyond that point of land, then they couldn't see whether we went to the shore or to the other side of the lake."

"That is so. That is the thing to do. They can't keep track of us without coming out onto the ice again, and I don't reckon they'll do that and take their chances with my shooting right away."

"Here goes, then."

"Here goes."

Cody led, and as there was no reason why they should keep close together, he was a good distance ahead when he rounded the point of land of which Wild Bill had spoken.

After getting to the other side of the point Buffalo Bill made straight across the narrow harbor beyond and reached the shore by the time his comrade had rounded the point.

Then Cody went ashore, removed his skates, and started to make a cautious reconnaissance to make sure that there were no Indians encamped within dangerous proximity.

His first discovery was a set of tracks leading up from the lake, and they were so fresh that it almost seemed as if they might have been warm to the touch.

There was no snow, and the earth was not of a character to take any distinct impressions, as it was frozen. But the fact that there were so few overturned leaves, and such care had been taken to leave as slight trace as possible, argued the possibility that the trail had been made by an Indian.

Besides, there was but a remote chance of there being a white man in that locality in any case.

Therefore, Buffalo Bill followed the tracks with the greatest care. At the same time he kept his senses all strained for a sign of the unknown person upon whom he felt that he was likely to come at any instant.

He observed another precaution. This was to keep himself shielded as much as he could behind the trees.

He crept forward thus for several rods, until at last he found himself facing a tree of considerable size.

Here he could detect by means of signs which only an old trailer could have observed, that the one he was tracking had slipped around to the other side of the tree.

And, not without a thrill of excitement, such as must be felt by anyone in a moment of uncertainty, he felt the conviction that the unknown was at that very moment on the opposite side of the very tree which shielded his own person!

He gripped a knife with one hand and a revolver with the other.

Then he was startled, and at the same time intensely relieved, by hearing a voice which he recognized—a peculiar voice, with a curious expression which one was never likely to forget—and the voice said:

"Waal, if this ain't tarnation close to bein' a tangle!—it is, by mighty!"

It was the voice of old Nick Wharton, to whom the reader of the last preceding story in this series needs no introduction.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TANGLES THICKEN.

Buffalo Bill was not slow in getting around to the other side of that tree, and there his hand was gripped by the older borderman so tightly that Cody winced.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "I believe you've got muscle enough to thrash me now, old as you are!"

"Want me to try it Bet ye I could hammer the besom outer yer cyphax!" chuckled the old man.

He had reached the age when, like a boy, he liked to show what sturdy muscles he had. But he was not childish in any other respect.

Living a life of outdoor hardship all his long life, hardly ever sleeping under anything more substantial than a lodge of skins, he was as hard as iron all through.

More than one assailant had found that they might better have tackled an average man of half his years than to have undertaken to down old Nick Wharton.

"Durn ye!" said the old man, "ye crep' up so mighty keerful that I couldn't git a fair glimpse of ye, and I wasn't sure ye wasn't a red varmint till ye was right t'other side of this tree. Then guess how I knowed who 'twas?"

"I couldn't guess, Nick."

"I got jest a glimpse of that hat brim. I knowed it in a minute. If ye had lent yer hat to a redskin I should have been ketched, sure as shootin'."

"That is so. But how happens it that you are 'way up in this region, Nick?"

"It didn't happen. I rid on the back of the same old gal."

"The mare, Diana?"

"The mare, Diana."

"Why, when I last saw her I reckoned she wouldn't pull through another season."

"Lord, Buffaler Bill! Ye mustn't ever say anything like that in the hearin' of Diana. Ye'd hurt her feelin's. Ye've no idee what sensitive feelin's that mare has. Why, when I fust got hold of her, thirty year ago, she was so sensitive about her age that she was sulky and sorter contrary about takin' her feed for more'n a week, jest because I 'lowed that, by her teeth, she might be gittin' to be pretty nigh twenty year old. Ye know it's jest that way with wimmin in gineral—they're techy when it comes to speakin' of their age."

"Yes, I know."

"Ye see, when my uncle owned Diana he 'umered her about everything. And it was him that learned her some of her tricks. She's the only critter of the hoss kind that I ever see that would kick frontwards

as well as backwards. Then, too, she'll travel backwards about as fast as she will frontwards. Which makes her jest as good as a double-back-action critter. Ye never see Diana run backwards, did ye?"

"You know I didn't see a great deal of her, Nick."

"I remember ye didn't. Waal, I'll tell ye what she did one time. And if ye doubt a word on't I'm willin' to swear that it's jest as true as ever 'twas.

"It was about four years ago. I think it was in the month of April, but I'm sart'in it wasn't the fu'st day of the month, because I can't never git the mare to stir a huff or eat a han'ful of oats on the fu'st day of April. And why d'ye s'pose she won't eat oats the fu'st day of April?"

"Somebody tried to fool her on that day?"

"Eggzactly. Give her a pint of shoe pegs 'stid of oats. Since then she won't eat nothin' skurcely on April fool's day."

"But you started to tell how Diana could run backwards."

"So I did. Waal, she was feedin' right at the bottom of pretty steep pitch of a hill. She stood with her head downhill and her hind quarters up'ards. Jest then a bear come out of the bushes right in front of her. The bear come out sudden with a w'wooff! Ye know what a noise they'll make sometimes, jest like a pig when it's surprised about somethin'?"

"Yes."

"Waal, Diana was skeered. She started runnin' back'ards right up that hill. And, by mighty!—she went so swift that when she got to the tip-top on't she hove right up in the air so there didn't ary one of her huffs tech the ground. When she landed it was clean over on t'other side of the hill! Which is as true now as ever 'twas, by mighty!"

Buffalo Bill was laughing at the absurd yarn when they both heard Wild Bill tramping up through the undergrowth without any attempt at caution.

"Pardner of your'n?" queried Nick Wharton, as the other scout came into view.

"Yes. It is Hickok, known as Wild Bill."

"Heerd of him, I reckon. Looks as if he might be good on the shoot. Which makes me think of somethin'. I heerd some shootin' up the lake a spell ago."

"I did a little of it, and Indians did the other part."

"Ary one of ye git killed?"

"I dropped a number of the reds, but you know they're poor fighting in the open, and they were too much rattled to hit anything. They scurried to cover as quick as they could."

"How many were there?"

"About twenty made a dash for me. If they had been good on the shoot I shouldn't have stood much of a show."

"Lucky there wa'n't more of 'em."

"Do you know how many there are encamped or hanging around on this side of the lake?"

"The woods are swarmin' with 'em—jest swarmin'!"

They're more numerous than I've seen 'em since the gre't uprisin' over in Minnesota, in 'sixty-four. Why, in that war the Injuns was more numerous than the trees, so there wa'n't enough trees for 'em to hide behind. Hadn't been for that they'd been fightin' yit. Why, one time—"

"Beg pardon, Nick," pleaded Buffalo Bill, "but I haven't time to listen to any more of your yarns just now, though I would rather do that than to keep moving, as duty demands. How long since you arrived in this vicinity?"

"I got here last night. And I pretty nigh friz campin' without a fire, which I didn't durst to build for fear of the Injuns."

"Yes, it was a cold night, and it promises to be a colder one to-night. I suppose the reds have a main or central camp somewhere in this vicinity?"

"That ere is back three or four mile from the lake, I reckon."

"You know just where it is?"

"Jest as well as a man can know where anything is that he ain't never seen."

"Guesswork with a man like you is worth something, Nick, and I'm willing to trust to it. But what I was after was to know if you had spied on the camp at all—had a glimpse of it, so as to know something definite about their number and general make-up?"

"Durned if I can help ye any on that score, Buffalo Bill. As I said afore, the woods are full of Injuns. The nigher ye git to their camp the thicker they be, jest like gettin' nigh a hornet's nest."

"You know something about the mischief they have been doing?"

"Burnin' cabins and murderin' settlers? Waal, I reckon I seen enough sign of that air. D'yé reckon Diana and I are mixin' ourselves up in a tarinal tangle of this sort without knowin' that we are needed? Why, by mighty!"

The old man suddenly became excited, and his naturally pale face flushed, while his somewhat thin and piping voice became strong and deep with feeling.

He straightened his bent figure, and as he stood before the scout pards the latter realized that here was a man who had at one time been a terror to the Indian scourge of the older borderland of the great West.

And there was enough of unexpended fire in him now to make him a terror still.

He was slow and old-fashioned ordinarily.

He loved to tell his absurd yarns when he might better have been doing something more effective—possibly.

But the man and the Indian fighter were still there. And when aroused, would he not be a big help to Buffalo Bill and his pistol pard?

Nick's old muzzle-loading rifle could carry true, and it was said that its owner had somewhere a tally of the murderous Indians and lawless desperadoes which the

ancient weapon had been the means of sending out of the world.

And the record must have been a long one.

"By mighty!" exclaimed Nick, "don't I know that innocent wimmin' and children have been murdered, or wuss, right up in these here peaceful valleys, where natur' meant that there should never be a stain of blood?"

"Hain't I seen white men lyin' all slashed and skulped right cluss to the ashes of their cabin homes? And wimmin and children, too? Ain't that what's fetched Diana and me here to take a hand in the tangle?"

"It's jest that and nothin' else, by mighty! and ye jest keep yer ear to the ground and listen for things to happen. Old Nick and Diana have got their blood up, and when a hoss gits to kickin' front'ards and a gun kicks t'other way, somepin' is bound to be doin'!"

Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill exchanged glances.

The latter had come up and stood a listener, without having been given the formality of an introduction to the eccentric old man.

Buffalo Bill had spoken of Nick too many times to allow of the other failing to recognize the old man now from the description.

And the acquaintance was made at a favorable moment, for Hickok was somewhat notional, and did not always take kindly to an eccentricity which was unlike his own.

But Nick's earnestness touched a responsive chord in the heart of the pistol prince.

The latter stepped forward and put out a hand for Nick to grip.

"Put it there!" he said, in his laconic way.

And they were friends.

More questions were asked about the Indian giant.

But the latter had not been seen by Nick, and he would not hazard an opinion as to the mysterious individual's standing, whether as a friend or a foe.

They went back to where Nick had left the miserable-looking mare, Diana.

The old man immediately observed some peculiarity in the behavior of the mare, and he instantly exclaimed:

"Diana smells redskins. So look out for a tangle!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTIVES.

Buffalo Bill had not for a moment abandoned his original intention of learning more about the mysterious Indian giant.

In this, however, he did not lose sight of the more important mission of discovering all he could about the encampments of Indians and the prisoners whom it was probable they had in their possession.

The rescue of such prisoners was a mission which

was the most difficult and dangerous to perform of any that fell to the border scout in the time of Indian warfare on the border.

In such work one man like Buffalo Bill could accomplish more than a thousand of government troops under the best of officers.

That the sagacious old mare of Nick Warton detected the nearness of the red foe was not to be doubted.

There are cases when the instincts of an animal may give instruction to the sharpest reasoning of its human master.

"I'll do a little reconnoitering on my own account," said Buffalo Bill, hurriedly. "We'll agree to make the shore of the lake at or near this point our meeting place at sunset, if not before. Is that right?"

"That's right," agreed Wild Bill, and Nick nodded his assent.

"That doesn't mean that we may not keep close together all the time. We'll do that as much as we can. But in mere scouting each of us may do more alone. When it comes to a round-up, we'll make a trio, I reckon."

"Or a try-up, by mighty!" chipped in old Nick.
Just then—zip!"

An Indian arrow clipped through Nick Wharton's whiskers and stuck into a tree right in front of him.

Naturally he sprang to one side and at the same time clutched his rifle, while he took shelter behind a tree trunk.

But Buffalo Bill observed the arrow. He had noticed that the Indians who had attacked him on the lake all had guns, and there had not been a bow or arrow in sight.

This did not necessarily argue that none of the Indians in that vicinity possessed bows and arrows, or that they might not make use of them upon occasion. But it made it appear less probable that a redskin in ambush should make use of one for the purpose of attack on the scouts in the present case.

Hence Cody, as soon as he saw that Nick was uninjured, sprang to pluck the arrow from the tree.

And, tied close around the shaft, he found a slip of white paper.

He tore it off instantly, and saw that there was writing on the inside of it, done in a delicate and beautiful hand, with a fine-pointed pencil.

"There are four white captives in the hands of the Indians encamped about one-half mile northeast of the eastern end of Cœur d'Alene Lake. Save them, for they will be shown no mercy!"

"MARIAN DUNLAP."

Such was the communication borne by the slip of paper, and thus was it signed.

But who had shot the arrow?
Not a hostile Indian, surely.

Cody's first impulse was to make a dash for the point whence the arrow had come.

But he thought better of it.

"If the unknown friend prefers to keep his identity hidden for the present, it is likely that he had some good reason for doing so, and it would be a bad return for us to make for his kindness to force him to give up his secret to begin with."

As Buffalo Bill formed this decision he showed the slip of paper to Wild Bill, forgetting that the latter was rather slow at reading writing.

"Oh! you do the reading and I'll furnish ears," said Hickok, with a shrug.

Cody complied.

Nick Wharton had his eyes open, and had marked the discovery of the message attached to the arrow when Buffalo Bill first discovered it.

He was an eager listener, therefore, when Cody read the message aloud.

"Dunlap, by mighty!" he ejaculated.

"You know them?" Cody quickly demanded.

"Course I know 'em. They were with a toler'ble strong body of settlers that had started all in a bunch for a place where they might either make a strong fight agin' the varmints or work their way to a fort.

"They was campin' down on the Kewer Delane River when I run across 'em. They knowed I was comin' up this way to look out for some of the more scattered settlers, and though I offered to stay with 'em, and help guide 'em to the p'int they wanted to reach, they wouldn't hear to it.

"They said they reckoned they was strong enough to take care of themselves agin' any number of the redskins that was like to attack 'em, and that the scattered settlers up this way needed me more'n they did.

"I reckoned they might be right on that p'int, though I have felt worried about the party ever since I left 'em.

"And now it 'pears that they all got into a tarnal tangle, after all. And that Marian Dunlap was a pretty critter —jest a reg'lar lily-of-the-valley!"

It was plain that the feelings of the old borderman were more than lightly touched by the tidings of the capture of the beautiful Dunlap girl.

And it was evident that there were others of the party also in the hands of the Indians, and what had been the fate of those who were not prisoners could only be conjectured.

The contemplation of their probable experiences was something that the scouts did not care to entertain.

"One thing is sure," said Cody. "The prisoners must have had a friend in camp or they couldn't have sent out that message."

"Yes," returned Wild Bill. "And whoever it was, has been on the watch so that he has located us. He must have seen us on the open lake or he wouldn't have come straight to this spot."

"There's hardly any doubt of it."

This was all the reply that Buffalo Bill made then, but he was thinking.

"What next, Buffalo?" said Wild Bill.

"We've got to locate the Indian camp where they're holding the captives."

"Before sundown?"

"It can't be done too early."

"But you don't expect to do anything more until after dark?"

"We'll do what we have to. Every moment adds to the danger and probably to the suffering of the prisoners. I wish the writer of that message had told whether the other prisoners were men or women."

The day was already well advanced.

The gusty wind which had been blowing earlier had settled into a steady blow, and it was growing more bitterly cold, as it seemed, every moment.

No snow had yet fallen, and there were no immediate signs of anything more than, possibly, a light flurry, such as usually accompanies a decrease of temperature.

It must have been below zero already, and to pass the coming night in camp without a fire would seem to be out of the question.

Wild Bill and Cody had come packed light. They had no horses within a dozen miles of Cœur d'Alene Lake.

The forest was so dense over much of that section that they believed horses would be of little use to them in their scouting expedition.

Nick Wharton, it seemed, would not go anywhere and leave Diana behind. The one was not complete without the other.

"Now we'll look for trails," said Buffalo Bill. "If the one who brought that message and shot it on the arrow came from the camp of the Indians where the captives are held, all we have to do is to find that trail and follow it backward."

"It may work, and then again it may not," growled Hickok.

Nick Wharton was strangely silent. He was munching a piece of dried meat with his almost toothless gums, and all the while he seemed to be in a brown study.

He saw Buffalo Bill slip away by himself among the tree shadows and stared after him absently.

At last he turned to Wild Bill and broke the silence.

"Your name Hickok?" he abruptly asked.

"Yes. But Wild Bill is the handle that suits me best. Not that I'm as wild as I used to be when they give it to me. But it's all in my blood just the same."

"F'i't Injuns a good deal, I reckon?"

"No, not compared with Buffalo Bill. But I've been up against a few of them, one time and another."

"Ever git the idee that Injuns was fools? Reel, mimsy, wimpsey ternal sort of fools—hey?"

"No, I reckoned they was pretty tolerably sharp-witted in a general way."

"Ever hear of their playin' tricks, strategems, that sort of bluff, on white folks?"

"I supposed that was their strongest hold."

"Waal, I reckon you're correck. Injuns is strong on strategems and whang-doodle-larums. They be, by mighty! And, say, Wild Bill?"

"What is it, Wharton?"

"Diana smelt Injun jest afore that arrer was fired at my ear. Diana never smells crooked. Her smellers are jest as correck as a dorg's. Now, I've got an idee that Buffalo Bill will find that he is on the trail of a flummy-dum. You've seen a flummy-dum, ain't ye?"

"Don't think I ever did."

"Waal, it's a good deal like a moke. Yas, it is a ternal sight more like a moke than it is like a dree. A ternal sight, by mighty!"

What did the old fellow mean?

Wild Bill gazed at him curiously as he munched his dried meat, and vaguely wondered if the old man had not slipped a cog somewhere in his mental machinery.

But Nick Wharton did not look to be either crazy or foolish.

Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill hunted for, and found, the trail of the "flummy-dum," which was a good deal like a "moke."

CHAPTER VI.

ON A MYSTERIOUS TRAIL.

Had Buffalo Bill overheard the remark of old Nick Wharton it would have made him smile when he found the trail which led from the spot where, evidently, the arrow must have been discharged.

To start with, the one who had sent forth the arrow message had to be quite close to the place where the three white men were standing, else the arrow could not have had a clear passage to the tree into the trunk of which it stuck.

The trees grew so thick together that a missile could not travel far without being stopped by the trunk or branch of a tree.

So Buffalo Bill knew that he would not have far to go to find the beginning of the trail.

Why should the one who had made use of that method of bringing the captivity to his notice take so much pains to conceal his identity?

It was a mystery; and of mysteries there are always a-plenty. Buffalo Bill did not like to puzzle his brain over them.

Not that he was not willing to work out a puzzling matter. That was like the work of a detective, and he had a good-sized gift in that direction.

But mere mysteries, which seemed calculated to bother without ever having anything at the base of them to repay the trouble of their solution, were an abomination to him.

And in the present case it began to look as if he was up against a puzzle of that sort.

For, upon finding the trail, it was a different one than he had ever struck before.

At first, it was very faint, so that he could hardly follow it at all.

Probably the maker of it had taken the trouble to cover the tracks, possibly with the intention of discouraging anyone from searching for it.

But gradually the tracks became more distinct, and a little farther on he could make out that there seemed to be a double set of them, as if the maker of them had been followed by a double or shadow.

The strides were long, as if the person—or persons—had been running.

So, had the scout heard the curious remark of Nick Wharton he might have come to the conclusion that he was, in truth, following the trail of a "flummy-dum," or, maybe, of a "moke."

That it was the track of one or two human beings, there was no reason to doubt. Whether it were one or two, the scout could not then positively decide.

"I wish I had taken old Nick Wharton along," he reflected, "and seen what he would make of it. Two heads are better than one, and he is mighty shrewd. That isn't all—I happen to know that years count with a man."

"If they didn't, then the few years of experience that I have had would be worthless. A greenhorn would be able to do as well as I."

Having fairly struck the trail, and puzzled a little at first over the character of it, Buffalo Bill dropped the mystery and fell to following it straight and at a pace which counted.

The wind, subdued somewhat by the trees, cut him in the face like a knife.

He was going in a direction that led diagonally away from the lake.

He judged that it would take him to the camp of Indians where the captives were said to be held.

This was what he wanted, although he well knew that there were the biggest kind of risks in approaching the camp without even the cover of darkness to shield him in case of discovery.

But what of the danger?

The king of the border seemed to hardly ever take it into account.

For half an hour he kept steadily on.

By this time the tracks were less distinct, and they seemed to be of a somewhat different character, although he could not be quite sure on that score, owing to their faintness.

But he soon made another discovery, which made him hesitate in the pursuit.

The tracks which he had been following were now merged with those of a considerable number of persons, probably Indians.

~~X~~ It seemed to indicate that he was approaching the main encampment.

Now the utmost caution was called for.

The tracks were fresh. He had to be constantly on the lookout ahead.

The precautions were soon justified by the sound of footsteps, and the murmur of guttural voices.

He crept forward literally upon all fours.

He came in sight of a natural opening in the forest, and a whiff of smoke was wafted to his nostrils, proving that those in the camp had a fire.

He could indistinctly discern figures moving about, and he judged that there was a considerable number of them.

Buffalo Bill crept as close as he safely could.

But there was no good concealment for him in the way of undergrowth, and although he could see many of the Indians as they moved back and forth before the fire, he could not make sure whether or not there were any prisoners in the camp.

He looked about him for some means of getting a better view of the camp.

Where he was there was the constant danger of some of the Indians coming out in that direction and discovering him.

That would frustrate any attempt or plan that he might make for the rescue of the captives.

He noticed a large spruce tree that stood near, and which the winds, or more probably a burden of ice at some time before, caused to lean out over the opening where the Indians were encamped.

To climb it was not difficult, and Buffalo Bill began the task the instant that he decided that he could from its upper branches observe the camp underneath in all its details.

He made short work of the climb.

Yet he had to use great caution, for there was the chance of making the twigs or branches crack.

Fortunately the wind was blowing so the trees roared with their own voices over the heads of the Indians, and they would not be likely to notice a slight additional sound.

Cody had to climb close to the trunk, and so he was hidden from the view of the Indians all the way up.

Having reached the height that he wished to attain he crept carefully out away from the trunk so that he might have a chance to peer down into the camp.

He found that he must get farther out than he had at first anticipated.

But he soon succeeded in getting to the position that he coveted.

He could look directly down upon the encampment.

It was much larger than he had at first supposed.

He found that there were three large fires burning, and there must have been fully forty Indians in the party.

That this might be only one of several similar camps

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

in the vicinity of the lake, Buffalo Bill had good reason to believe.

Having made out so much the scout cast about for some sign of the captives.

At last he found that a small group were huddled at one side of the camp, partly hidden by a clump of shrubbery.

Whether they were whites or Indians, he could not have told. But a fire burned near them, and he could see that two redskins crouched, guns in hand, one on either side of the group.

That was enough in itself to tell the story.

These were the prisoners, and the two Indians were the guards.

Probably the captives were so securely bound that they could not make much change of position.

"Here they are at last!" Buffalo Bill exclaimed under his breath.

It was still broad daylight, and the dusk of twilight would not begin to fall for at least an hour, for the sky was only lightly overcast.

Could anything be done then to liberate the prisoners?

There were many chances that might operate against such a possibility.

One of these was the chance that the Indians might, after their frequent habit, choose the night for activity, and get on the move as soon as it was fairly dark, aiming for the homes of the nearest white settlers.

There was a chance that they intended to do another night's work of the horrid sort which they had been engaged in for more than a week.

In that case there would be small chance of liberating the captives.

It would be doing well if they could be prevented from taking more white prisoners.

"I reckon that I can't act too quick," he reasoned.

"But as things show up, it might have been better if I had brought Wild Bill and Nick Wharton along. Then a part of us could have done the shooting, if it came to that, while one trotted out of the way with the prisoners."

"But there would be the chance that they might be in the way instead of helping—it often happens that way in playing a game of this kind."

"It is for me to play it out alone, and the sooner I'm into it the better."

He had no definite plan of procedure.

But he must get back onto the ground and work himself around to the side of the camp where the captives were guarded.

He began to work back to the trunk of the tree, so that he might begin his descent.

Suddenly a slender limb upon which he leaned too heavily bent under him.

He struggled almost frantically to recover his balance.

He caught wildly at another slender branch—for a spruce affords hardly anything else after one gets away from the trunk.

That dropped also, and Buffalo Bill fell headlong to the ground, landing fairly upon the shoulders of one of the Indian guards!

CHAPTER VII.

A SCRIMMAGE.

In taking a flight from the branches of a tree to the ground a man may think of a great many things.

Buffalo Bill had been unable, while he had plenty of leisure for thinking it out, to plan a way of attempting the rescue of the prisoners.

But in the fraction of a second that it took for him to drop from the tree to the shoulders of the redskin guard he thought out an excellent plan—that is, if he could only make it work.

But there must be no waiting to figure on chances.

The redskin on whom he alighted yelled, of course.

But it was only once.

A knife slashed across his throat and he fell forward with a terrible grin of death frozen upon his face.

The scout's rifle had been strapped securely to his back, and it was not dislodged in his fall.

He had no use for it now. It was the time for something quicker than a rifle. He must sweep everything before him at one bold stroke or the battle was lost.

The other Indian guard was the nearest of the foe who had not been disposed of. He sprang up and would have leaped upon the scout.

But there was a blaze and a report close to his face, and down he went with his skull perforated by a bullet from a heavy revolver at close range.

Then Buffalo Bill turned his battery of two revolvers upon the bewildered redskins, who had not yet had time to make out what it was that had dropped in among them, bringing death in his wake.

The revolvers sputtered, and in the midst of their racket the wails of death went up from the stricken redskins.

They were falling like tenpins.

They had not had time to get hold of their rifles, except two or three of them, who fell with bullets in their hearts before they could fire a shot.

It was a desperate game that he was playing.

It had to be done at a swift pace.

He must deal out death with a merciless hand, and at the same time he must inspire those who lived with a panic of fear.

All the better if the element of superstition entered into it.

With a wild and unearthly howl, that sounded almost as if it came from the depths of the forest on all

sides of them, the border king dashed straight into their midst, his revolvers still vomiting fire and lead.

The savages fell back in consternation.

If one showed inclination to stand his ground he was the next to bite the dust.

It was the wildest, the most reckless fight that Buffalo Bill had ever put up.

In the fury of it, in the midst of the passionate encounter, he seemed to forget that there could be such a thing as death for himself.

It was more than the Indians could withstand.

It was another battle in the open, and they lost their heads.

They fell back precipitately to seek shelter among the trees.

The instant that he saw that every soul of them was in retreat, Cody wheeled and made a dash for the spot where the captives were confined.

There was not time then to take even a look at them.

The shadows were not so dense but that he could easily find and cut the bonds that kept them prisoners.

There were four of the latter, as the note from Marian Dunlap had stated.

Two were women, one was a young fellow, apparently about sixteen years old, while the fourth was a little golden-haired girl of six.

So much Buffalo Bill made out in the sweeping glance that he cast over the group at the moment that he cut all their bonds.

"Come!" he said, in a low voice. "You are free, but it will be a run for life. Keep close to me, and make no more noise than you can help. I'll carry the little girl in my arms."

The younger one of the ladies would have spoken, but he silenced her with a word.

"Don't talk," he said. "Save your breath for running. It all depends on that. I'll cover your retreat as well as I can, for, if the little girl will only cling close around my neck, I will have one hand free to pump lead."

The older woman lifted the child to the shoulder of the scout.

The latter clasped her close.

"Don't be afraid of anything now, Nellie," said the woman, who was the child's mother. "The man will take you away from the wicked Indians."

This assurance, supplemented by a few kind words from Buffalo Bill, brought to the child such a sense of safety that she clung close to her rescuer, cuddling her face down in his neck in perfect confidence.

The sensation of the little girl clinging to him in that dependent way seemed to inspire the brave scout with a double portion of strength and nerve for the struggle that he knew was between him and victory.

He started ahead, going in a direction just opposite to that which had been taken by the terrified redskins.

He knew that the bewildered fear of the Indians would not last long.

There were some counselors among them who would urge them to follow the man who had made such havoc in their ranks single-handed.

Then, with the horde of redskins on his track and pressing him hard, there might be another story to tell.

He found that his companions, even the women, knew how to get through the forest at a good pace, so he was able to run ahead without a fear that they might not be able to keep up with him.

He kept on away from the camp until he felt confident that, at least, immediate pursuit was not to be apprehended.

For twenty minutes the flight continued with as much speed as the conditions would allow.

Then, observing that the older woman showed signs of lagging from weariness, Buffalo Bill halted and waited for them to come up with him.

The young fellow had kept close behind him all the way, while the young lady walked at the side of her mother.

"You can rest for a few moments now, madam," said the scout, for the first time breaking the silence.

She stopped and leaned against a tree, breathing hard from her exertions.

Buffalo Bill set the child on the ground at the side of the mother. At the same time the latter asked:

"Is it safe to stop here, sir?"

"It isn't safe to stop anywhere within ten miles of this spot. But we have got to take some chances."

"But where are your companions? Haven't you a strong party of white men with you?"

"I have two comrades only, and I hope to find them a little farther on."

"Were they not with you just now when you attacked our captors?"

"No."

"Do you mean to say that you made the attack and effected the rescue alone and unaided?"

"Yes."

A further exchange of speech told Buffalo Bill that those whom he had rescued were all members of one family.

The young lady was Marian Dunlap, the young man was her brother, Frank, the little girl her sister, Flossy, and the woman the mother of them all.

Their father had been murdered by the Indians at the time that they were taken prisoners.

A few words from Frank and Marian informed Buffalo Bill on these points, and in return he quietly told them to whom they owed the first stage of their rescue.

Their conversation was carried on subject to many interruptions, for the scout would not neglect making a complete circuit of their stopping place every few moments, for fear that the enemy might creep up unawares.

All were warmly clad, and yet it was so cold that they would soon have to get near a fire to keep them from suffering.

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

Buffalo Bill had decided to work his way back to a spot which he had noticed quite close to the shore of the lake.

This was on a line with the point where he had left Wild Bill and Nick Wharton, and if he fell in with them on the way so much the better.

There they would make their camp for the night with the lake on one side of them.

That would guard them from the unseen approach of the enemy from one direction.

A dense thicket on another side would prevent the Indians approaching without making some sounds, and the other sides would be the more easily guarded.

It was so cold that it was out of the question to take the fugitives across the lake that night.

Did not Buffalo Bill realize what a burden he had taken upon himself, in undertaking to restore the fugitives to security and comfort?

Was it not a time when the greatest heroism of his strong nature was to be taxed to its utmost?

Already he could see that Mrs. Dunlap was comparatively feeble.

She would not be able to withstand a long and forced march.

Then there was the child, the most helpless of them all, and yet the one who, more than any of the others, appealed to the chivalry of the scout's nature.

Buffalo Bill could hardly realize that he had so far succeeded in setting them all at liberty.

He had not planned to do it in that way. It was the stroke of a bold purpose to which he had been partly forced by his accidental fall from the tree.

He had no thought that it would succeed. But its very dash and impetuosity compelled success against all reasonable calculation.

Yet perhaps the most insurmountable difficulties lay in the near future.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT.

Contrary to Buffalo Bill's expectations and fears, he reached the spot for which he was aiming with the fugitives without interruption by the enemy.

He wondered not a little at the fact that they did not immediately institute a vigorous pursuit.

He could account for it in only one way.

In the manner in which he had descended into the Indian camp, slashed and shot the warriors, cut the bonds of the prisoners and spirited the latter out of the way, there had been something that had impressed them as being akin to the supernatural.

And it was no wonder.

It had all been done on the cyclone schedule.

Many of the greatest victories have been won in that way, and those who did the fighting could not tell afterward how they managed to do it.

It was so with Buffalo Bill.

And now, with the fugitives dependent upon him for their preservation, he was as much at a loss what to do for them as he would have been had they owed their rescue to some one else.

On the way to the lake shore the scout took pains to pass the very point where he had separated from Hickok and Nick Wharton.

But he saw neither of them.

That they would return, however, before night set in, Cody felt sure, since such, in effect, had been their agreement.

Buffalo Bill set about making the camping place which he had chosen as snug and comfortable as possible for the night.

He knew that he could work much better and faster by daylight, and as the day was drawing to a close, he hastened his preparations.

He found that Frank Dunlap, the boy fugitive, was willing and intelligent in assisting in the work.

The young fellow had said but little since his rescue, but that the wonderful work of the great scout had made a deep impression on him was evident enough.

He had heard of the great Buffalo Bill, and here he had seen him do a greater deed than any that had ever been related concerning him.

In the warm heart of the boy the fire of enthusiasm was kindled. He thought of the murder of his father by the Indians and of the hardships to which his mother and sisters had been subjected, and he determined to take a hand in the work which must be done toward the quelling of the bloodthirsty redskins.

Cody told him how to pile up the small branches of spruce which they gathered so as to make a shelter from the bitter cold of the wind which swept with increasing fury across the lake.

This done, leaving only a small opening on that side, and clearing a space on the other sides so that the foe could not approach under cover and peer into their lodge, Cody next directed the attention of Frank Dunlap to the task of gathering an abundant supply of fuel.

Already the little girl was crying with the cold, and a fire was kindled.

With the wind shut out in some degree, the cheer of the fire would be of more effect, and at the same time the light of it could not be observed far from the camp excepting in the direction of the lake.

"You think of everything, Mr. Cody," said Frank, when the preparations were completed, the fire built, and the fugitives were gathered about its genial radiation.

"It would be death, and worse, to forget anything," replied the border king.

"Yes. And yet most people do forget."

"And die, when they're situated as we are to-night."

"I suppose so. And you think we're in a pretty bad fix, don't you?"

"Rather."

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

"And that the redskins will follow us here and try to take us again?"

"They would hardly take the trouble to take you prisoners again."

"They'd kill us outright, you think?"

"More likely."

"And will they try for that before morning?"

"They may."

"And what can we do to fight them off?"

"I shall do some more shooting before I let them clean us out."

"I wish I had a rifle. I'm a good shot, and I might spot one or two of them. I did kill one redskin when they pitched into our party yesterday."

"Good! I have no extra weapons, but something may turn up. Here is a knife that you might use if it came to close quarters. But we will hope for something better than that. Only we must be prepared for the worst. If we can get through the night we'll beat them. But there are some black hours just ahead of us."

"I guess that's so. If it wa'n't for marm and the girls I wouldn't mind. You and me could whack through somehow."

"Yes, we could whack through."

"You said you had a couple of companions somewhere about here?"

"They are not far from the lake shore."

"Do you expect they'll be around before morning?"

"I hope so."

"Who were they? Scouts like you?"

"One was Wild Bill, the other an old hunter, trapper and Indian fighter known as Nick Wharton."

"Nick Wharton! Oh, I've seen him. He came to our cabin just before we left it. He wanted to do something for us, but father thought the old fellow would do pretty well if he made out to take care of himself."

"I reckon your father sized the old man up wrong."

"You think he could fight yet?"

"He is a terror to the Indians. His tongue wags a good deal, but when he fires that long rifle of his something is sure to fall."

"He is the most comical old chap I ever saw."

"He has a heart as big as that of an ox."

"I wish he would get around here before it is dark."

"The sun is down now and it'll be dark pretty soon."

"How about Wild Bill?"

"He is the best shot with the revolver to be found in the West."

"Then the three of you would make quite a team!"

"Yes, something of a team, if we can only have a chance to pull together."

"But if they shouldn't come?"

"I'll have to guard the camp alone. And I'll have to do it by staying outside and walking around it frequently. Then the reds can't approach without my

knowing it. And if they do come I'll make it as warn for them as I can."

"You are immense, Buffalo Bill! If we can get my mother and sisters to a safe place somewhere I'll come back and be a scout with you as my leader. I will be your boy pard."

"You would not be my first."

"You have had a boy pard before?"

"More than one."

"And I suppose they were more trouble to you than they were help?"

"No. A boy with nerve, who doesn't let his head enlarge too fast, and who is willing to observe and learn, may make an excellent scout. He must be perfectly willing to face anything that may come."

"I could face anything after what has happened in the last twenty-four hours."

"Perhaps."

This conversation was held a little apart from the other members of the little party.

The sun had set.

The shadows were creeping out of the depths of the forest, and the terrible night, with all its mystery, danger and suspense was settling upon the lake and woods.

Marian and Mrs. Dunlap, with the child, were huddled close to the fire.

Shielded from the force of the blast, they were more comfortable than they had been at any time since the beginning of their captivity.

A few spruce boughs had been thrown down close to the fire, and a blanket spread over them for a bed for little Flossy.

Covered by another blanket, the child had already fallen asleep.

All thought of the terrible dangers through which she had passed were shut out from her thoughts by the present comfort and impression of safety.

It was hard for the women, even, to keep awake, so delicious was the sense of warmth and comparative safety.

They almost felt as if Buffalo Bill would be sufficient to protect them from the horde of Indians which swarmed in the forest, unaided by the other scouts, if the latter should fail to join them.

"A question, Dunlap," said Buffalo Bill, after a brief interval of silence.

"What is it?"

"Your sister wrote a message stating that she and others were captured by the Indians, and giving brief directions by which the Indian camp might be found, didn't she?"

"I believe so."

"Whom did she give it to?"

"To the Indian giant!"

"Ah! Then it was he, after all, who fired the mysterious arrow, and who made the peculiar tracks which led me to the camp of your captors."

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

"Probably."

"Then you can tell me something about him?"

"Very little."

"Hark!"

They heard the sounds of approaching footsteps.

CHAPTER IX.

DIANA ON GUARD.

That the reader may not be kept in suspense unnecessarily, it may be stated at once that it was Nick Wharton, with Diana, the mare, whose footsteps broke the stillness beyond the camp.

But, before starting for the point where he had agreed to meet Buffalo Bill at nightfall, old Nick had a little adventure of his own.

He and Wild Bill had separated, going in almost opposite directions.

Nick reached the vicinity of the camp of the Indians only a short time after the scrimmage had ended, when the prisoners were rescued by the brilliant *coup* of the border king.

Nick might be old, but there was nothing the matter with his hearing.

He could hear the Indians chattering some time before he came within sight of even the uttermost pickets of the camp.

For, after returning to the camp from which they had been stampeded by the spectacular appearance of Buffalo Bill, and the pistol practice to which he had treated them, the Indians posted pickets or sentinels all around their camp at a considerable distance from it.

Diana scented the first of these pickets, and Nick prepared to do something.

He dismounted from the scraggy mare and stole up to where the redskin sentinel was standing.

The Indian was young and lithe as a sapling.

Nick Wharton was old and gnarled like a veteran oak.

But he swept one hand around and caught a grip on the redskin's windpipe.

The redskin tried to twist away.

But he could not.

It was a grip of death on his throat, and to add to his troubles the butt of a heavy pistol whacked him on the head.

He dropped to the earth and lay there and quivered while the last breath of life went out of him.

Then Nick rose and kicked the dead Indian in the ribs.

"Saved him from the sorrows of bein' old!" muttered the old trapper.

Then he went back to Diana.

"Be a dead hoss," he commanded in a soft voice.

Diana lay down carefully and counterfeited death to perfection.

"Now, Diana," pursued Nick. "If any Injuns come nigh, kick 'em. Kick frontwards or backwards, jest as happens to be handiest. Kick hard and often. Understand, Diana?"

The strange animal wagged her head up and down.

Even as the horse signified her understanding in that manner Nick heard the light tread of an Indian sentinel, who was evidently coming out to salute the other whom Nick had just done for.

The old scout glided away from the prostrate horse and crouched near at hand in a thicket.

No evening shadows had yet fallen, and the red sentinel saw the seemingly dead animal stretched out on the ground as stark as if it were frozen.

His curiosity was aroused.

He could not imagine how a horse could have gotten to that spot and quit living since he had last patrolled that way.

He went around the motionless body gingerly, and there was something that caught and held his attention.

It seemed to him that the gridiron outline of the animal's ribs rose and fell, as if the horse was breathing.

He went up closer and reached a hand out to touch the horse's hip.

He had to draw a little closer yet, and then his fingers touched.

He wanted to make sure if the body of the horse were cold.

Chug!

One of Diana's heels flew out, and took the Indian in the stomach.

It had a more elevating effect on that particular savage than any amount of missionary effort could have done.

An unearthly yell burst from the redskin's lips as he shot up and away.

It wasn't far from the camp, and the kick fired the Indian to the very edge of the little opening in which the other redskins were gathered.

The savages at the moment were engaged in an animated discussion of the event which had cost them so dearly, and by which their white captives had been lost.

Several of their number lay dead in that forest glade, and there was a dispute among them as to whether the swift shooting, which had thinned their ranks, had all come from the mysterious assailant who had dropped from the clouds, or whether there had not been other foes concealed among the trees who had taken a hand in the work.

It was incredible to them that it could all have been done by a single foe.

It was no wonder that they had not yet summoned the courage to attempt a pursuit and recapture of the prisoners.

And now this new wonder occurred.

One of their pickets came smashing through the lower branches of a tree and landed almost in their midst, yelling and wobbling about on the ground in mortal agony.

He was in a bad way.

At first the Indians did not quite dare to approach their suffering comrade, for they were impressed with the idea that he might be possessed by some kind of an evil spirit.

When one of them finally examined the injured red-skin he was more mystified than ever, for the appearance of the warrior was such that it gave no clew to the cause or character of the hurt.

It appeared to be mortal, and that was all they could tell about it.

It was suggested that the space beyond the glade, from which the picket had been fired, be explored.

Three of the warriors started to make the investigation.

In due course they found what appeared to be the body of a dead horse—a horse which seemed never to have been very much alive.

It occurred to them that their comrade had come upon the body of the animal suddenly and that it had frightened him, and that in some way, in running away from the spot, he had come into collision with a tree, and so met with the hurt.

This was not a very probable explanation, but they could think of nothing better at the moment.

Certainly, they thought it altogether beneath their dignity to be frightened by the body of an old animal which had, probably, strayed away from some camp and dropped from hunger, cold and exhaustion.

Two of them went up to it—one at the head, the other at the tail-end.

Both kicked it, to show their contempt for a horse that had no life in it.

One of those Indians—the one at the tail end of Diana—was kicked on the knee, and sent tumbling into a thicket with a broken leg.

The other, who undertook to investigate the head of the queer beast was kicked “frontwards,” and at the same time the mare snapped with her teeth and gave the savage a nip on the leg that inflicted a double sort of misery.

The amount of yelling that the afflicted warriors let out would have done credit to a grand powwow.

Diana at the same time saw her master approach and heard him say, in his mild tone of command:

“Come to life, Diana. Ye been dead long ‘nough!”

Up she sprang as if animated by an electric battery.

Nick tumbled onto her back, and with all the uproar that was being made by the kicked and bitten Indians, he did not have to be careful about making a noise.

He rode right past the edge of the Indian camp, and two or three of the warriors got a fair sight of him.

But they did not attempt to shoot. He cut such an uncouth and uncanny appearance, and the strange things which had been happening to their comrades filled the uninjured ones with such dismay, that they dared not try to inflict any punishment on the thing that whipped across the edge of the open glade like a wraith.

Nick was just as well pleased as he would have been if they had tried to cut him out with bullet or arrow.

With all of his audacity, he was not in the habit of taking unnecessary risks.

It had been his object, aside from inflicting as much damage as possible upon the enemy, to ascertain if there were any white prisoners in the camp.

He did not know, of course, what execution had been done in that camp by Buffalo Bill.

Had the latter not been there first, however, old Nick would not have had such a good chance to act the part that he carried out so successfully.

He came to the camp at a moment when the Indians were still demoralized by their recent experience.

Their ranks had been considerably cut down by the double visitation. Yet the survivors were getting into a mood that would be likely to urge them to more desperate action.

Even as Nick Wharton flitted through the edge of the camp some of the bolder ones of the Indians were making ready to start out on a more aggressive campaign.

“That’s curi’s, by mighty!” was the muttered comment of Nick Wharton, when he found that there were no white captives in the camp.

But another idea occurred to him at about the same time.

The Indians had evidently been in an excited and demoralized state at the moment when he had discovered them.

Was it not possible that Buffalo Bill had been there ahead of him?

He had noticed that several motionless forms lay in a row, lightly covered with blankets at the side of the camp.

They looked like dead Indians.

“I’m goin’ to look for tracks, and if I find any I’ll foller ‘em, by mighty!” decided Nick.

He found tracks, but it was no easy matter to untangle them from others. Yet in time he was led back to the new camp pitched by Buffalo Bill and the fugitives.

Which brings us to the point from which we diverged at the beginning of this chapter.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEFENSE.

Buffalo Bill and Frank Dunlap were not long kept in suspense by the sounds which had come to their ears.

"Save yer powder, Buffaler," called Nick Wharton, with no attempt at caution in the key of his voice. "I ain't anxious to die at the hands of my friends, nuther is Diana."

"Come along, and glad you're here," Cody called back, while the heart of the young scout—for Frank already was mentally so calling himself—bounded with the intensity of relief to his anxiety.

Nick and the mare showed themselves at the opening in the bough barricade. There he dismounted and carefully covered the mare with a blanket.

There was plenty of coarse, dried grass close to the shore of the lake.

"I have to put a blanket on pretty tight over Diana's ribs," he explained, "to prevent the feed siftin' out through 'em when she eats. It's a peculiar streak about Diana—the siftin' out of her feed through her ribs. It don't seem to be nothin' that she's to blame for."

"She seems to have more ribs than most animails of the hoss kind, if ye ever noticed. Anyway, I never see so many ribs in any other live hoss. Account for't any way ye like."

"Well, Nick, what is the report?" asked Buffalo Bill, after the old man had seen to the comfort and safety of the queer old mare.

In his own way Wharton related the incidents at the Indian camp as they have already been detailed.

Frank Dunlap so far forgot their situation and his loss in listening to the old man's comical tale that he laughed quite heartily.

The women, meanwhile, seemed to have fallen asleep. The child had been sleeping for some time.

Frank was the first to observe this, and he mentioned it to Buffalo Bill.

"I am glad of it. They will need all the repose they can get before they reach a place of absolute safety."

"The night is all before us, and, unfortunately, the Indians in the camp, where Nick and I have made some trouble for them, are only a small part of the total that I have reason to believe are swarming within two or three miles of here."

"I imagine that they will try to get together, and they will naturally head toward the lake, with the idea of crossing on the ice."

"If we could get out of the way by going directly away from the lake we would do that. But many of the Indians are right in the pass that we would have to go through—they stand betwixt us and any spot where there would be any hope of even temporary refuge."

"To get to a large settlement or back to the lines of civilization we must get to the other side of the lake

—in exactly the same direction as that in which the reds are themselves steering.

"I have looked the ground over pretty well in my mind, and figured on most all of the chances, and I don't find any course that doesn't promise plenty of danger and trouble."

Old Nick was munching a piece of dried meat, as usual.

To the words of Buffalo Bill he made no direct response.

But it was evident enough that he realized the gravity of the situation.

He went over and looked down at the bundled-up form of Marian Dunlap.

"Too durned purty, by mighty!" he grumbled.

Then he peered down into the face of the little girl, Flossy.

"Terrible little mite of a thing to be in sich a tarnal tangle!" he commented.

Lastly, he glanced at the mother, who was sleeping out of sheer exhaustion.

"And she's too feeble for sich doin's. Ain't nary one of 'em the right sort to be took and tortured by the red varmints."

"Tain't as if they was like a great aunt of mine that was took by the Injuns in old Kentucky. She was a leetle thing, too, compared to an elephant or a whale. But for a female woman she was toler'ble hefty. Tipped the scales clean over at three hundred and sixty."

"The Injuns captured her. They was goin' to try the fat out of her at a slow fire, they reckoned. But they didn't have the things to do with where they took her, so they sot out to kerry her to their main camp."

"They had a terrible time gittin' her onto a hoss. Then the hoss' laigs was pushed right down into the mud so deep that he couldn't pull 'em out. It was spring of the year and soft goin', ye see."

"They tried another hoss, and then another, till they got six on 'em all stuck in the mud, with jest their bodies above ground."

"Kaintucky hosses was wuth somethin' in them days, and they couldn't afford to shove any more of 'em into the mud in that way. They wouldn't last, by mighty!"

"Then they tried riggin' up a drag to haul her on. But she kep' rollin' off'n it, owin' to her bein' built so that she'd roll one way as well as t'other."

"They found it tarnal hard work shiftin' of her around, and finally they thought they'd shoot her where she was."

"They could hit her easy. But the lead was jest ordinary, and wouldn't go through her corporosity so as to reach a vital part. She didn't bleed none to speak on, and when they'd shoted about half a pound of lead into her she still seemed to be enjoyin' toler'ble health."

"Last one Injun figgered that he could kill her with

a club. The tothers let him try, though they didn't seem to have no faith in it amountin' to anything.

"Waal, he went at her with the club, and she tried to dodge, and the club hit her on the shoulder. Ye see she was so fat, and so durned hard, that she was jest like Indy-rubber. So the club bounced back and flew out of the Injun's hand.

"That wa'n't the whole on't. She sorter lost her footin' and tumbled right over onto the Injun and mashed him as flat as a blade of grass. My aunt did, by mighty, and the yarn is jest as true now as ever 'twas!"

Buffalo Bill had observed that old Nick Wharton told his absurdest yarns when the direst dangers were impending.

Possibly he did it to clear his own mind, although it seemed more probable that it was more to cheer his comrades in peril.

Frank Dunlap was laughing at the absurd yarn, and when the old trapper stopped the young fellow asked:

"Well, Mr. Wharton, how did it come out? Did your aunt escape, or did the Indians finally succeed in killing her?"

"Why, it was the Wharton temper that settled the ternal tangle in the end. The Whartons air slow to anger, but once rouse 'em and there's bound to be a ruction.

"My aunt Emmeline—mabbe it was Abagil—I forgit which, but, leastways, it wa'n't Susan—finally got provoked, they was so durned persistent. If they'd seemed to been willin' to quit when they'd tried a fair number of times to put her out of the way she wouldn't said a word. She wouldn't, by mighty! But they got mean about it, and kep' pesterin' of her after they knowned it wouldn't do no good. So her Wharton temper riz and she went for 'em like a load of stone. They couldn't stand up a minute when she whacked at 'em; and once down it was good-by to 'em.

"She poked 'em over with her fists and then stepped on 'em. That's all she did. After she'd stepped on one of 'em that partick'lar Injun jest naterally wa'n't no more good as an Injun. I forgit how many she trod under foot that way now, it was so long ago the yarn was told to me, and so I won't mention any figgers, for fear ye might think I was exaggeratin'. I'd hate like time to have ye think I'd set it too high.

"Leastways, she made mighty bad work with 'em, and then walked thirteen mile to the home of her sister. She lost considerable flesh after that, my great aunt did, and was cut off from this world in her freshness and prime at the age of ninety-eight."

"Nick," said Buffalo Bill, "are you sure it wouldn't be better for one of us to be getting a bit of sleep the first part of the night, instead of stringing yarns?"

"You might snooze, and I'll do the stringing."

"Aren't you tired and sleepy?"

"Nary a bit. I sleep a week solid sometimes, and then don't have to snooze any more for two or three days. You curl up under a wolfskin for a couple of hours, and I'll keep the fire goin' and travel round the camp frequent."

"Well. And if there is Indian signs you will rouse me at once?"

"Quick as a rabbit's foot!"

"All right."

Buffalo Bill was a good sleeper when he had the opportunity to use that talent. And it's the good sleeper that wins the biggest battles.

He was wondering why Wild Bill had not put in an appearance.

Nick Wharton was worried over the same problem all the while that he was stringing the absurd story about his great aunt.

Just before Cody lay down for his nap he spoke to Nick in a low tone:

"Know anything about Wild Bill?"

"Nary a thing."

"No sign?"

"Nary sign."

"Done any guessing about him?"

"Nothin' worth tellin'."

"It is mighty queer he hasn't turned up."

"Tarnal queer."

"But neither of us ought to leave the camp to look for him. These fugitives are all as helpless as children."

"Yes, jest as helpless, by mighty!"

"Well, Nick, I can trust your eyes, ears and judgment. An hour's slumber will patch me up. I didn't get much last night—I was traveling."

"Snooze, durn it all!"

And so, within the frail defense, the border king slept, the fugitives dreamed, and the veteran scout watched.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INDIAN GIANT AGAIN.

For the fire in the little camp the dryest and lightest of fuel had been provided.

There was an abundance of dead wood all about them, and a large supply had been collected by Buffalo Bill and Frank Dunlap, his young pard.

Cody tried to have the young fellow lie down when he did. But Dunlap simply could not bring himself to slumber while surrounded by such mystery and danger.

He would have to keep awake until the excitement of the situation subsided so that he could compose his nerves.

He was an active, healthy young man, and so strong and well grown that he did not yet feel much fatigue

from the ordeal through which he had passed during the last twenty-four hours.

Alone with the veteran scout, Frank Dunlap experienced a keener sense of the danger and loneliness of their situation than he had done with Buffalo Bill at his side.

He realized what a magnetic and inspiring force went forth from the border king.

It was something for which he could not account, and yet many had felt it when in his presence under similar conditions.

Nick Wharton let Dunlap keep the fire going. As for himself, he went out of the inclosure and made a circuit of the camp.

Dunlap met him at the entrance.

"See anything?" the young fellow asked.

"That durned Injun giant is out yender. I've made up my mind that he ain't nothin' to do with the Indian devilment. But he is a queer-actin' specimen. He beckoned to me, and then, when I tried to git nigher to him he backed off. Acted jest as some gals do to'ards fellers. You know how that is, youngster."

"Yes, I know," smiled Dunlap.

"But," Frank added, "I know the Indian giant, as you call him, is friendly to us white settlers."

"How ye know?"

"He came into the camp of the Indians when we were prisoners among them. The Indians act queer about him. They seem sort of afraid of him, and yet they seem to think he is friendly to them. But he doesn't stay with them."

"The time I speak of, my sister Marian noticed that he kept looking at her and once she imagined that he made a secret sign to her. Anyhow, as her hands were free, she managed to write a message on a slip of paper and flutter it so he could see it."

"He seemed at first to take no notice. But after a while he came close to her, and with his back toward us reached out one hand. She put the message into it."

"And he come and shoted it tied round an arrer, and that's the way we found out you was prisoners 'mong the reds."

"Yes. And that proves the Indian giant to be friendly."

"Seems to prove it, by mighty!"

"You say he is now near this camp?"

"Yes."

"And he beckoned to you?"

"Yes, and I went towards him."

"And then what?"

"He kept drawin' away from me."

"You didn't follow?"

"Not by a durn sight. D'y'e reckon I was goin' to be pulled into a tarnal tangle with my eyes both wide open?"

"Of course you didn't know about his friendly deed to us. But I would follow him if he beckoned to me."

"Don't ye do it, youngster. These mysterious crit-

ters do master queer things sometimes. I ain't fastidious nor anxious, but I'm tarnal skutacious when it comes to follerin' Injun giants and sich."

"He may have wished to give us a warning of some kind," said Frank Dunlap.

"Then why in thunder didn't he do it, 'stid of haulin' off and haulin' off when I tried to go up to him?"

"That I don't pretend to understand."

"I reckon I'll go around agin' and see if he's still hangin' around. Mabbe I can coax him up not to be quite so durned coy."

The testimony which Frank had given as to the good offices of the Indian giant reassured Nick Wharton somewhat.

Again he slipped out of the inclosure and vanished in the darkness.

The moments that followed dragged heavily for Dunlap.

He wished that he had accompanied the old scout.

And yet it would seem better that one of them remain within the inclosure.

He went to the narrow space which Buffalo Bill had left as a means of egress.

He listened and stared out into the darkness.

Before him stretched the black, level surface of the big lake. The forest line of the opposite shore was merged into the gloom.

Suddenly a tall, black shadow crossed his line of vision.

It was gliding swiftly along the frozen lake surface
"It is the Indian giant!"

The young fellow sprang out through the opening and would have stepped upon the ice.

A hand grasped his shoulder and pulled him back.
He wheeled, his heart in his mouth.

He met the gaze of Buffalo Bill.

"I reckon you're not particular about living!" exclaimed the border king, sternly.

"That is the Indian giant, and it was he who carried Marian's message to you, and by that means we were rescued."

"Yes, I understand. But you haven't a thing to defend yourself with except a knife. You don't really know anything about that big fellow. He may have done you a good turn, but you don't want to trust him too far till you find what sort of a bluff he is playing."

"That's so—I was careless. I ain't a scout yet. My head is inclined to grow too fast. I'll have to keep under your eye a good while before I can start out alone as a scout. I shan't blame you if you don't want to trust me again for quite a while."

The young fellow was cut up over his heedlessness. The rebuke in the tone of the great scout, more than his words, touched him.

But the hand of Cody touched his kindly the next moment, and he said, at the same time, in his friendliest manner:

"I want to trust you again now, boy. Take this

revolver and go out and see if the Indian giant will speak to you. Make friendly signals to him. He might let you approach when he wouldn't let either Nick Wharton or me."

Dunlap took the proffered revolver and thanked the scout for the prompt show of confidence.

If he had felt a momentary resentment toward the scout it was gone as quickly as it came.

He stepped out onto the ice, while Buffalo Bill withdrew so that he could not be seen by the giant in case the latter should pause for the young fellow to come up with him.

Yet the scout could observe them plainly from the doorway of the inclosure.

For the moment the Indian giant had passed from view.

But, as Dunlap went out boldly onto the lake, Cody saw the mysterious Indian again skate into view, and, after circling around for a little, as if he were trying to make out to a certainty the identity of the one approaching, he finally wheeled and skated straight toward Frank Dunlap.

The latter was approaching by running and sliding as one may do on glare ice without skates.

The wind cut so fiercely across the lake that the young scout realized that he could not long endure the exposure, unless he were better clad.

Buffalo Bill had roused from his slumber at the moment Nick Wharton started out the second time to reconnoiter.

He had heard the last words that passed between Nick and Frank.

Now he watched the young scout as he met the Indian giant, the latter having halted quite near him, and having made several signs with his hands.

At the same time he listened for the return of Nick Wharton.

Suddenly the heavy report of a rifle broke upon the stillness.

Cody knew it was not the weapon of Wild Bill. It was the heavy muzzle-loader of the veteran scout, Nick Wharton.

"That means trouble!" muttered Cody.

It was hard for him to stand inactive.

But he dared not leave the inclosure, for the women and child would be undefended.

"The hour for the final struggle is at hand, I reckon," he muttered.

"The redskins have probably gotten together, and with reinforcements they won't wait long before they make a try for wiping out old Nick and me. We have done them too much damage for them to neglect the hunt for us. They'd rather clean us out now than to burn and kill all the inhabitants in a whole settlement.

"They'll strike our trail for vengeance, and when redskins do that thing they'll make a more desperate chase of it than they will when they're doing it just for conquest."

There were fully two minutes of silence after the heavy bang of Nick Wharton's rifle. It was broken only by the soft roar of the wind through the tops of the spruces.

Then there was a chorus of savage yells—short, sharp, yelping, as only a redskin can send them out.

They were taken up and answered and echoed from a score of points, near and distant.

It sounded as if the Indians had approached from all directions at the same time, and some of them were already within a hundred yards or less of the camp, while others were not nearer than several times that distance.

"They're drawing in!" muttered Buffalo Bill. "They have succeeded in locating us, and now they won't let up on us until they've cleaned us out or been worsted in the fight. And what show is there of our winning under these conditions?

"It is mighty slim!"

Cody did not feel like this because he feared for himself. The chances which seemed too small to him were those of getting the fugitives either to a settlement or military post in safety.

The greatest obstacles were the child and her mother, neither of whom was able to endure much hardship.

Marian and Frank could probably pull through the necessary ordeal.

Cody set his teeth grimly.

The burden of the battle was on his shoulders, he knew that.

He had a presentiment that Wild Bill had gotten into trouble. Doubtless he had fallen into an ambush, and it might be that his life had already paid the penalty for some audacious attempt, such as he was likely to make at any time.

Then there was Dunlap out on the ice with the Indian giant. It would not be easy now for him to return to the camp without being cut off by the redskins.

The conditions had reached a crisis.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOWS ON THE LAKE.

The Indians did not cease their yelling for some time.

Whether they kept it up for the purpose of terrifying their enemies, or for the purpose of signaling, was a matter of conjecture merely.

Buffalo Bill did not much care what their object might be. He was glad, on the whole, that they did keep it up.

It told him that there was no use in entertaining a feeling of security until this locality were left well in the rear.

He saw the Indian giant gliding slowly out toward a point of land which was concealed by trees from the doorway of the camp.

Frank Dunlap was running and sliding along at his side, and it was evident that the mysterious Indian was keeping his own pace down to that of his companion.

What was the meaning of it?

Buffalo Bill feared that the young fellow was being led into a trap of some sort.

In any case, it seemed imprudent that he should allow himself to be drawn any farther away from the camp where his friends were.

Cody felt a light touch on his shoulder.

It was Marian Dunlap. By the light of the fire he could see that her face was deathly pale.

"The Indian yells awakened me," she said.

"I don't see how you could help being awakened by them."

"My mother and Flossy are still asleep."

"So much the better."

"But don't you expect an attack?"

"It is likely to come at any minute."

"And then they will take us again?"

"Not as long as I can put up a fight for you."

"Where is Frank?"

"He is with the one who brought your message to us—the one they call the Indian giant."

"Frank is with him! Where?"

"Out on the lake. They just disappeared behind the trees yonder."

"How does that happen?"

Buffalo Bill explained the circumstance.

"And your friend, Mr. Hickok, your scout partner, hasn't come back?"

"No."

"You think he is in trouble?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Where is the old scout—Nick Wharton?"

"Here he comes, by mighty!"

It was old Nick himself. He dashed into the inclosure like a cyclone. His face was smeared with blood, which was flowing from a thin gash across his forehead. There was a strangely set expression upon his face.

"They're comin', hail Columby!" he exclaimed. "I've shot one of the varmints, and cracked the skulls of half a dozen. There's a billion of the varmints, more or less, out yender, and they're yellin' to git their courage up. They reckon that Buffaler Bill and old Nick air a combination that'll make 'em sick, and they want all the evil spirits in their calendar to ante up and help 'em fight us. They reckon it'll take something beside bullets to do us up."

"You ran into a nest of them?" queried Buffalo Bill, speaking as coolly as though they were not face to face with probable death and defeat?"

"No; a nest of 'em run into me. We had it pretty warm for a long minute and a half. Then I give them

the slip, and some of 'em air chasin' the rainbow that I left behind me yet. I got 'em started in one direction, and them shifted sudden, doubled on my tracks, hid behind a tree, and let 'em scoot right by me. Then I started ahead, curved around and soon fetched up here.

"Some of 'em are gittin' farther and farther away from here every minute. But there's enough of 'em left, and they'll be here pretty soon."

"If it hadn't been so bitter cold I would have gotten these fugitives to the opposite side of the lake to-night. But it couldn't be done. It all goes against us. The fight has got to be here, I reckon."

Still the Indian yells continued—here, there, from every imaginable point.

Buffalo Bill had thought of another probable reason for this persistent yelling, when nothing seemed to come of it.

That was, that they might be keeping up the noise to cover the approach of a detachment of warriors who would attack the camp.

This was such a likely explanation that Buffalo Bill momentarily expected to see a horde of the Indians burst into the inclosure.

"Nick," he said, at last. "I have got to take a run around the camp myself to see what is in the wind. You won't leave on any account while I'm gone?"

"I'll stick like a plaster, Buffaler."

"Stay—did you find out anything about Wild Bill?"

"Not a thing."

"You were shot across the face?"

"With a durned arrer. I reckoned it might be pisoned. But I had my fortin told once, and they said I'd never be hung, drownded or pisoned, so I ain't goin' to worry about it till it kills me, and then I can't worry, by mighty!"

To Buffalo Bill, who was worrying intensely on account of the danger to the women and child under his protection, it seemed that Nick Wharton must possess a singular disposition to be able to keep up such a constant air of unconcern and jollity.

Without another word, the border king turned to leave the inclosure on a tour of reconnaissance.

But the hand of the girl detained him.

"You will not stay?" she asked, her voice low and tremulous.

"No. I'm going to stick by you, your mother and sister."

"Accident to you would mean worse than death for us."

"Yes."

"Heaven speed you!"

He made the reconnaissance a hurried one.

As Nick had represented, the woods literally swarmed with Indians. But they did not seem to be actually drawing much closer to the encampment of the fugitives.

At least, those who were the nearest remained in

the same spot. But the more distant parties of savages who were answering the signal cries were approaching. In other words, the scattered bands were all getting together.

"They won't attack us just yet," was the decision of the scout.

"But the respite won't be a long one. We must make ready for what is bound to come."

"I wish now I had ordered the rest of my scouts to cross the lake to-night if I didn't come back. As it is, there is small chance of their doing so."

"I have time to go down to the lake and see what has become of young Dunlap. That redskin giant is a mystery. He seems friendly; yet I can't feel quite sure of him."

He made his way to the lake shore, at a point a short distance from the door to the bough-inclosed camp.

He could see nothing of either Dunlap or his strange companion.

He went out upon the lake for a short distance and looked in all directions over the broad, black surface.

The ice, cracking in all directions, boomed with a dismal sound. The cold wind cut across and nipped his face.

It was cold, dreary, forbidding in its aspect.

But, suddenly, the gaze of the scout became fixed upon what seemed to be several moving forms out toward the point from which he had crossed on skates several hours before.

The sky was overcast, but there was a moon behind the haze, so objects could be discerned at a considerable distance with tolerable distinctness.

Now he was sure that there were men coming across the ice from the other side, and they moved as if they were skating rather than walking.

"And they are!" exclaimed the scout.

"Are they fugitives from one of the Indian raids? Or, can it be that they are, after all, the rest of my band of scouts, whom I didn't expect to see until I returned from this part of my journey?"

"I knew this trip couldn't be taken safely with horses, and the hardship of coming on foot was so great that I would not ask them to face it. If it is them, then there may be a chance of our getting the fugitives back across the lake in the morning, after all."

"If we can only manage to fight the reds back until daylight, then we'll have a new chance to win. But, alone, as we are now, I hardly see a chance of doing it."

In his eagerness to make sure as to the identity of the approaching forms on the lake, Buffalo Bill went out still farther from the shore.

Suddenly he heard a yell, and then a strange clattering on the ice close behind him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COLD CHASE.

The yell came from an Indian; the clattering was made by the hoofs of Diana, the trick mare of Nick Wharton.

The redskin had stolen out from a thicket at the end of the narrow peninsula, and was stealing forward to gain a position whence he could get the form of the scout more clearly outlined for a mark at which to get a shot.

It was at this juncture that Diana, who had been nibbling the coarse grass near the edge of the ice, observed the Indian.

All her life the mare had been trained by Nick Wharton to hate Indians.

A redskin could not have mounted upon her back, or put on her bridle without being treated to evidence of her antipathy.

And now, seeing the Indian come out quite near to where she was feeding, she could not resist the temptation to show her hostility.

Consequently, she started out on to the lake at a brisk trot, and when the Indian turned to perceive what was in pursuit of him, the mare was almost up with him.

She started into a gallop, and with that wonderful speed with which she could, if she chose, surprise people in traveling, she bore down upon the terrified redskin.

He turned so quickly, and at the same time tried to keep retreating, although he was going backward, that he did not take into account the extreme smoothness of the ice.

His feet went out from under him, and he went onto his back.

This occurred just as he would have taken a shot at the horse.

As he fell the gun dropped from his hands.

The next instant Diana was trampling him under her small but spiteful hoofs, spurning the body of her natural enemy with all the viciousness of her nature.

Buffalo Bill ran back and bent over the prostrate Indian.

The mare had trotted back to the shore, satisfied by her exploit.

The Indian was quivering in the throes of death, his face trampled out of all human semblance.

"That is a wonderful animal!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, his admiration of the sagacity of the singular horse knowing no bounds.

"Probably she saved me from getting a treacherous shot in the back. And it might have been the shot to put an end to me. Who knows?"

He looked back to see the shadowy forms which were skating toward him.

They were now so distinctly visible that there could

be no doubt that they were white men, and that they were all on skates.

"And they must be my scouts. Yes—there are six of them. Every one of the brave fellows is there!"

Buffalo Bill experienced a new gleam of hope.

Well did he know that there were fearful odds against them even at best. But he could stand that if there were only a chance of winning out in the end, no matter what the cost.

The hard thing to do is to keep fighting when you know it is a losing game.

Now it was necessary to get a signal to his scouts to tell them where he was, and at the same time to inform them of the danger that lurked in the vicinity, in case they chanced not to be aware of it.

Diana had disposed of one Indian who, as it appeared, had come as far as the lake shore.

It was probable that there were others equally near, so there was a blooming chance of a shot from ambush at any moment.

But the signal must be given.

Buffalo Bill drew a revolver and fired three times in the air, with exactly the same interval between the shots.

It was a signal that the scouts would be sure to recognize.

To prove that they did so, he saw three flashes from an upraised hand of the foremost of the approaching skaters, and then the three answering reports, that sounded in strange contrast to the hollow booming of the ice.

It was a wild night, a wild scene, and there was more wild work at hand.

Yet more than half of the night had really passed, and if the few remaining hours could be gotten through somehow, the rest would at least seem to be easier.

"Now I'll go back to the camp and tell them of the good news, and we'll be ready to welcome my old comrades, who were too faithful to hold back when they had an idea that I should have need of them."

"But I'm worried about Wild Bill? The bluff, big-hearted fellow is in a tight place, I'm sure of that, or he would have been back before this time. If I see him again alive it will be almost more than I expect."

The scout made his way back to the camp.

In a few words he acquainted Nick Wharton and Marian Dunlap of the coming of his scouts.

And he found that old Nick showed as much delight over the good news as did the girl who, perhaps,

did not fully realize that their situation otherwise would have been well-nigh hopeless.

The old man had been chipper as ever all the while, but it was not because he expected to pull through the "tangle."

As it was with the brave border king, Nick Wharton could have taken care of himself easily enough. But how they were to save the women and child, surrounded as they were by a horde of Indians, was more than he had figured out.

And not for an instant did he dream of such a thing as looking out for himself and leaving them to their fate.

That kind of heroism is easy to read about, but when it comes to practice it, sometimes it appears in a different light.

Buffalo Bill told Nick of the thing Diana had done, in trampling the Indian to death on the ice.

"Jest like the gal," he said.

"All her parients hated redskins jest the same, and it is born in her flesh and bone, as ye might say. Ruther more in the bone, I reckon, owin' to the skeercity of flesh in her partick'lar case."

"Good many people wonder what makes that mare so durned thin. Now it ain't because she don't have enough to eat."

"She'll eat and eat all day. There's nothin' that that mare don't seem to enjoy eatin'. She'll chaw up thistles, or glass, or iron scrap, and seem to enjoy 'em, and they'll appear to nourish her like timenation."

"But none of her vittles seems to go to fat. It all runs to brain and muscle, same as it does with my branch of the Wharton family."

"It was different with the branch that the great aunt I was tellin' ye of belonged to. She all went to fat, and didn't eat nothin', skurcely. Why, that great aunt has been known to git along 'thout anything to eat outside of her reg'lar meals with what little she could cram down between 'em, for two months, by mighty! And still she kept in toler'ble flesh all the time."

"I reckon, Nick, that we'll have to give that great aunt of yours a rest pretty soon," smiled Buffalo Bill.

"Oh, Lord! ye needn't trouble about her the least bit—she ain't tired!" grinned old Nick.

The border king had already decided what to do.

Now that they had help in the task of getting Mrs. Dunlap and the child across the lake, there could be no doubt but that it were better to start at once for the other side.

He aroused the woman, who was still sleeping, and told her of the change in their prospects, and the necessity for being on the move.

While he was talking with her he heard the shout of his scouts as they reached the shore in front of the camp.

In another moment they crowded into the inclosure, six bluff, hearty fellows, glad to get to a fire, although they were in a glow from the exercise.

The greetings between Cody and his scouts were hearty ones, as may be supposed. It did not take long for him to acquaint them with the situation, and of the decision for immediate action which he had just made.

They agreed with him in his judgment, although they would have been glad enough of some rest by a good fire.

But with the prospect of an immediate attack from an overwhelming body of Indians, it were useless to entertain a hope of repose until after the night should end.

The scouts each carried a warm blanket strapped on to his shoulders with his other accoutrements.

It was decided to rig up something in the shape of a drag, which might be used as a sled for the transportation of Mrs. Dunlap and the little girl across the lake.

The Indians had ceased their yelling, and this was regarded as ominous, as it portended an attack within a short time.

Nick Wharton went out on another reconnoissance, agreeing to keep a close watch on the movements of the Indians and to report anything that might be regarded as immediately threatening.

But, as a matter of fact, the redskins were none too anxious to attack a camp where they would have to meet two propositions of the sort of Buffalo Bill and old Nick Wharton, and they were trying to work up a scheme whereby they might achieve their purpose with the least possible risk to themselves.

Meanwhile, some sticks were trimmed out, bound together with thongs, and covered with boughs to serve as a sled, or, more exactly, as a sort of Russian "droffsky."

It was swiftly and yet remarkably well done, and within less than an hour after the arrival of Cody's scouts they were ready to begin the bitter journey back across the lake.

Mrs. Dunlap, Marian and Flossy were loaded onto

the queer rig, tucked up snugly in blankets, and three of the scouts got hold of the drag-rope and started to skate back over the level surface.

A chorus of Indian yells from the shore spurred them on!

CHAPTER XIV.

ACROSS THE LAKE.

Buffalo Bill had now done all he could to insure the safety of the fugitives.

But he could not follow them until he had made sure about Frank Dunlap.

Old Nick would remain with him. As the scouts dragging the heavy load could not make the greatest speed there was a chance that the border king and veteran scout might overtake them before the other side of the lake was reached.

Cody and Nick took to the shelter of trees, and, as a number of Indians started to follow the fugitives on the ice, the scouts began popping at them with such deadly accuracy that the reds were soon driven back to cover—those who were not hit.

It was wonderful how rapidly Nick could load and fire his old muzzle-loader.

And every time it went bang the lead plowed through the flesh and bone of a hapless Indian.

Diana, seeming to understand the danger from bullets flying hit-or-miss, kept to cover while the shooting was going on, ready, nevertheless, to obey a call from her master whenever it should come.

The scouts with the fugitives had gotten only a short distance away from the shore when Buffalo Bill espied two other forms darting out from the peninsula which has been several times referred to.

One was the Indian giant, the other, Frank Dunlap.

The latter was on skates, and he showed that he knew how to use them.

It was evident that the strangely assorted pair were on the most friendly terms.

Dunlap turned in toward the camp, while his companion stayed outside, circling around with a wide sweep while he waited.

Buffalo Bill signaled to show the young fellow where he was concealed among the trees. At the same time, as Frank neared the shore Cody called out to him, warning him that he was in danger of being met by a shot.

But Dunlap reached the shelter of the trees without

serving as a mark for an ambushed redskin, and was soon at the side of the border king.

"Well, boy," said Buffalo Bill, "what is the word? You seem to have found a pard in that big Indian."

"The big Indian is true-blue," said Frank, warmly.

"Then you've found out something about him?"

"All we need to know."

"Is he a real redskin, or is he made up in that style for some purpose of his own?"

"He is a real redskin, but he belongs to a tribe from over the border in Canada."

"It seems that a gang of Indians from this side was at war with his tribe, and in a raid they killed a sweetheart of his."

"As near as I can make out by what he says and his appearance generally, his wits were a little upset by the trouble, and he came down here partly with the idea of getting revenge, and also believing that the spirit of his Indian maiden is here, and that she will show him what Indian or Indians were concerned in her death."

"On that score you see he is cranky; but, otherwise, he seems to be straight enough."

"Speaks good English, and can read and write. But he is shy of white people this side of the border. He says the white people here are mostly treacherous to his race, and he doesn't trust them in general."

"Yet, as you see, he is ready to help the settlers when they are beset by the hostile reds."

"He seems to have taken a liking to me, and he hated to have me leave him."

"But how about my folks? And who are those men dragging that thing out on the lake?"

Buffalo Bill briefly explained.

In turn, Frank told the scout that the Indian giant had an extra pair of skates with him which had been small enough for young Dunlap.

"Now what do you want to do?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"I wanted to stay with the Indian giant until morning, at least, and I think I can prevail upon him to make friends with you and your scouts, and maybe he will be able to do you a good turn if you need it."

Buffalo Bill pondered a moment, and then said:

"Well, I reckon it will be all right. According to your account, the big fellow is to be trusted so far as friendliness is concerned, although you never quite know what to expect of a man whose brain is a little off."

"Be careful, and remember that your mother and sisters will want to see you safe pretty soon. They

don't realize that you are old enough to start out and make a scout of yourself. I know it, however, and I wouldn't wonder if you made a good one before you are a year older."

They clasped hands and Dunlap returned to the Indian giant, who seemed to be getting impatient, fearing, doubtless, that the white scout would not let him return.

Buffalo Bill hunted up Nick Wharton and said:

"There is a little quiet now, and I think we will do well to cross the lake. We can in that way cover the retreat of the others. How about Diana? Can she travel on the ice at a fair pace?"

"Lord, yes. Why, that animal learned to skate like any young gal when I first had her, and she ain't forgot how yit, only she don't think it looks dignified for a female of her years to kite around on skates!"

"Well, if she can skate, better persuade her to throw off her dignity for the time, as it is speed that is going to count, I reckon."

"She can trot along peart and all right. Jest git ready, and I'll show ye the pace on the back of Diana."

Old Nick and his queer steed fulfilled the promise.

They went out upon the frozen surface at a pace that Buffalo Bill could hardly keep up with on his skates.

They now had the wind to their backs, which made it easier to all hands.

At first they thought that they were to hear nothing more from the Indians for the present.

But when they were fairly started a perfect storm of bullets were sent after them.

The shots were accompanied by a hideous chorus of yells.

None of the shots touched them. But Nick feared for Diana, and urged her to a quicker pace, that soon carried them beyond the range of the weapons of the Indians.

They overtook the other scouts with the fugitives before they were halfway across the big lake.

The other side was reached in safety.

But day was breaking as they reached the shore, and all hands were tired enough to go into camp and rest up and eat a hearty breakfast.

They knew that they were by no means safe from the Indians, a considerable party of whom the scouts reported as encamped near that shore also.

This encampment contained one of their leading chiefs, who, it was believed, was awaiting the coming of the main body of the Indians from the other side.

An hour after sunrise the scouts beheld a long line of warriors crossing over, but directly for a point about two miles below where the whites had landed.

It was evident that they did not intend to expose themselves to the fire of the scouts on the open lake.

But, as it happened, there were other eyes that saw the passing Indians. They were the eyes of a member of the chief's party, which had just approached the shore at a point quite near to where the scouts and fugitives were in camp.

Nick Wharton, on a little reconnaissance, reported this discovery to the other scouts.

He had scarcely done so when one of the latter saw a half dozen of the Indians going out onto the lake, gesticulating to attract the attention of the big party fully two miles away.

One of the half dozen Buffalo Bill recognized as the chief, whom he knew to be at the head of the hostile bands which were making so much trouble throughout the territory.

The border king held a hurried consultation with his scouts in which he proposed a scheme that might result in the ending of the war, and that without so much bloodshed as would be necessitated by conquest by force of arms.

The idea looked feasible, and was instantly approved.

But there was not a moment to lose in the execution.

Buffalo Bill and the six scouts again put on their skates, and in another moment they shot out upon the lake in hot pursuit of the half dozen redskins.

The latter, running, could not hope to equal their pursuers in speed.

But they had a pretty good lead, and if they could have had a near shore directly in front of them they might easily have gotten to cover ahead of their foes.

As it was, there was a longer chase, and there was such an element of doubt in the outcome that there was plenty of excitement in it.

But, finally, as the Indians turned toward the shore the race became warm and close.

Neither the scouts nor the Indians had yet offered to make use of a gun. For the latter to have done so would have killed their chances of getting away by flight; while they were not anxious to start a duel in the open, well knowing the deadly skill of the scouts with the rifle.

They were glad enough to let it remain a simple

running chase, with the chance of a hand-to-hand encounter at the close.

But, suddenly, as they drew nearer the wooded shore they perceived something close ahead that brought a new element into the race.

And it was all against the Indians.

At that point a small but rapid stream flowed into the lake, and there was thin ice and a narrow, open strip of black water so close ahead of them that there was hardly time to swerve aside. And the scouts observed the obstacle at the same time.

"Now we have them, boys!" cried Buffalo Bill. "Take the chief alive and wipe out the rest of them!"

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

The Indians turned with yells of dismay.

There was not time for them to prepare to make use of any of their weapons except their knives.

But every one of the scouts pulled a revolver, and while they descended upon the Indians with the sweep of a cyclone, they sent a storm of lead ahead of them that mowed down the redskins like grass.

There was not one of them, except the chief, who was not dropped at the second discharge.

This proud warrior saw that there was no hope of escaping capture, which he understood was their purpose, if he were to stand his ground.

So he wheeled with lightning quickness and made a bold leap for the other side of the open strip of water.

He fell short, as was anticipated, and he dropped with a splash into the icy current.

Meanwhile Buffalo Bill skated swiftly around the end of the open space, crossing ice which was so thin that he would have broken through had he stopped or slackened his pace.

He reached the other side just as the chief came to the surface.

Blinded and chilled, the brave redskin was grasping at the thin ice on the other side.

Buffalo Bill lay flat and reached out a strong hand that gripped that of the chief firmly.

The latter might have let go and drowned rather than yielded himself a prisoner. But the voice of the scout persuaded him differently.

"It is not your life or the lives of your warriors that we want," said Buffalo Bill. "You are a brave chief, and you should live for your warriors. And not a hair of your head shall be harmed."

"Come. It will be better for you to live and make peace with the white people, and save the lives of your warriors, than to die, and leave them to be defeated and scores of them killed in a war that can do them no good."

The situation was a favorable one to induce the chief to listen to a reasonable argument.

He gripped the hand of the great scout tighter yet, and said:

"It is well!"

It was not an easy matter to haul the chief onto sound ice. But it was at last accomplished, and Buffalo Bill led him to the shore and there quickly disarmed him.

They were soon rejoined by the other scouts, and after the chief had been given a blanket to protect him from the bitter wind, they returned to the camp with their prisoner, and there Nick Wharton had a good fire going, so that the Indian was soon made comfortable.

The matter of sending a messenger to the camp of his followers next had to be arranged.

The chief was eager to make a pledge of peace, now he was where he couldn't help himself. And it was Buffalo Bill who dictated the terms.

These were, in brief, to the effect that they—the scouts—would restore the chief in safety to his warriors in exchange for any and all white captives they might have in their power at the time.

The chief also pledged himself to maintain peace as far as his authority and influence extended between his warriors and the settlers, guaranteeing to the latter immunity from all kinds of lawlessness and depredations.

A writing to this effect was made, and the chief affixed his signature, for it was found that he could read and write, after a fashion, thanks to the good offices of a white prisoner who had once been in his camp, and whom he had caused to be killed afterward as a reward, probably.

The chief had a bad record; but here was a chance to use him to a good purpose, and Buffalo Bill was sharp enough to make the most of it.

By the time their arrangements and terms were completed, Frank Dunlap and the Indian giant arrived.

The latter could not be persuaded to enter the camp of the white men. But he readily accepted the commission of delivering a message from the chief to certain of his warriors.

The negotiations progressed with such speed that before nightfall small parties of Indians were coming in from all quarters bringing the white prisoners whom they had taken.

One of the last to be brought in was Wild Bill.

The latter was in a surly mood. He showed signs of having been in a hot scrimmage, and he refused absolutely to explain how he had been caught by the enemy.

"I tried a fool trick, that's all," he declared. "If I'd been killed outright it wouldn't been any matter. But to be ketched by the cowardly devils! That's too much!"

More than this they could not get out of him.

Yet it was certain enough that the truth would not have been to his discredit in the least.

This just the same as closes this episode in the career of Buffalo Bill, and to none of the characters who have figured therein need be bidden more than a temporary adieu, unless we except the Indian giant, who soon after disappeared from that locality.

Frank Dunlap came to think a great deal of Buffalo Bill, and the latter was to prove of help to him in more ways than one.

The Dunlaps went to the nearest settlement which had not been wiped out by the Indians, and there found plenty of friends.

As for old Nick Wharton and Diana, they were not yet old enough to die!

THE END.

The next issue (No. 159) will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Timber Thieves; or, The Camp of the Secret Clan." This is not an Indian story, although there is an Indian in it. It tells how a young and wide-awake agent of a big lumber company got Buffalo Bill to do some detective work for him in the far Northwest. With red-hot fighting and rattling adventure of other kinds, there is nothing slow in this story from start to finish.

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